Jack Johnson . Foster the People . Michael McDonald . Slowdive . The Barr Brothers

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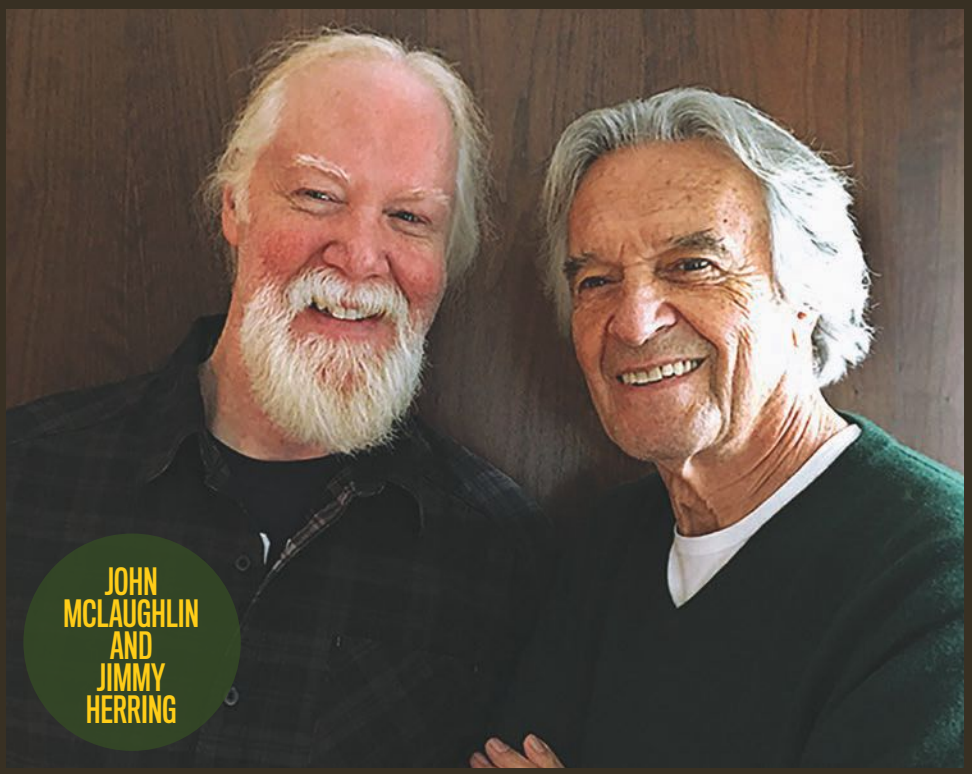

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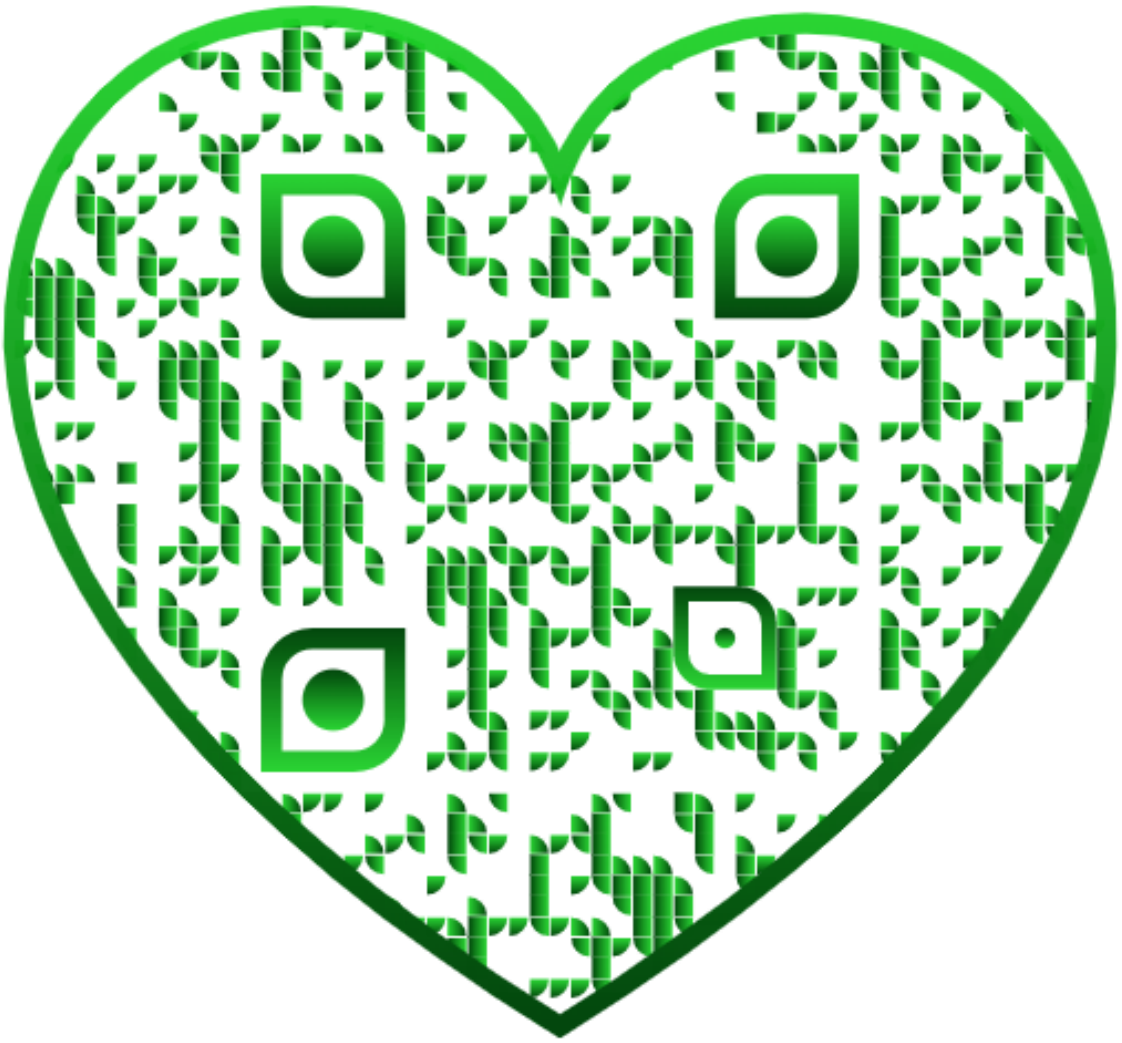
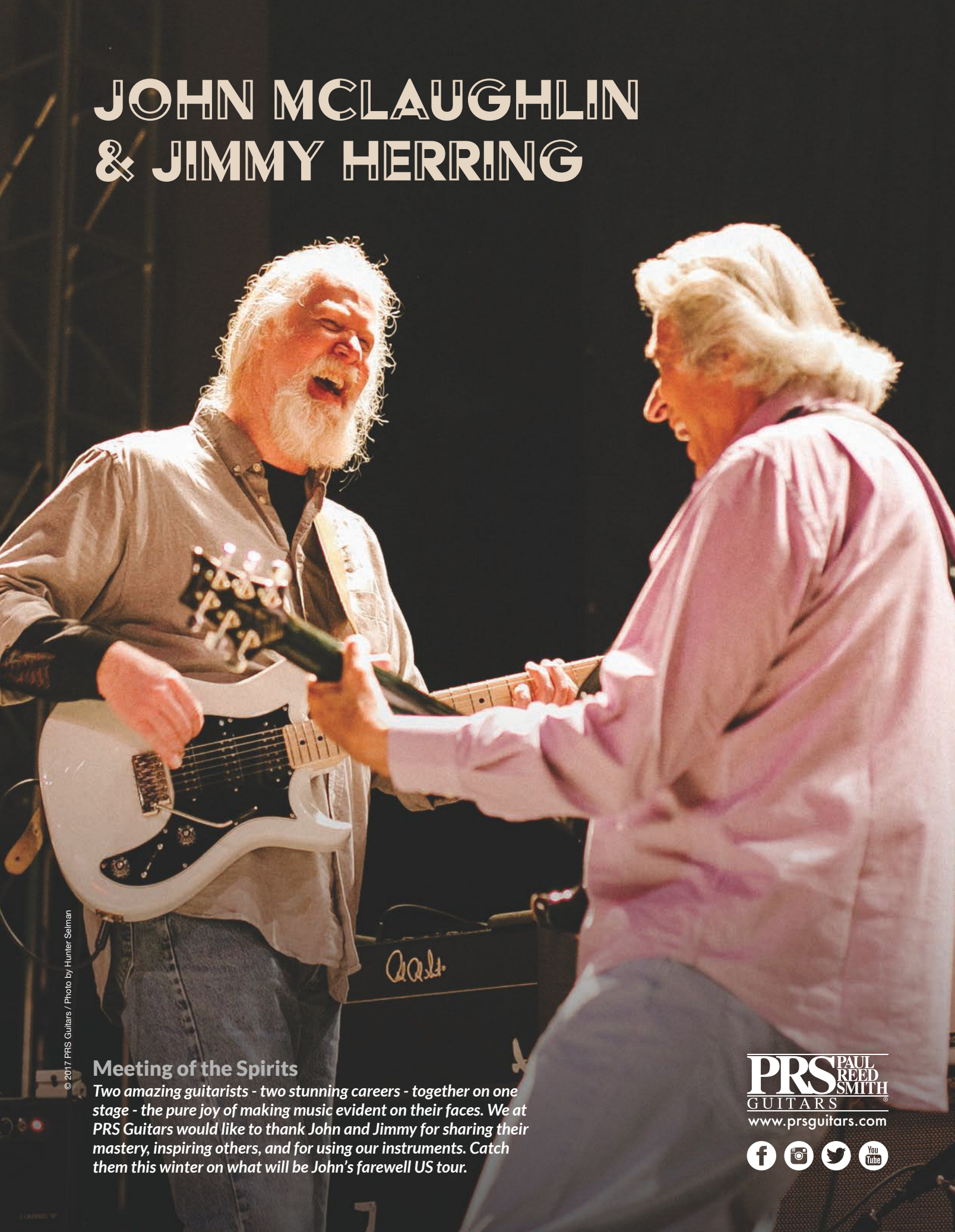


JOHN MCLAUGHLIN & JIMMY HERRING



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Meeting of the Spirits

Two amazing guitarists - two stunning careers - together on one stage - the pure joy of making music evident on their faces. We at PRS Guitars would like to thank John and Jimmy for sharing their mastery, inspiring others, and for using our instruments. Catch them this winter on what will be John's farewell US tour.

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V44 NO7

THE PERSONAL IS the political.

This rallying cry from the late-1960s and early-1970s seems as relevant today as ever.

The idea, as you can imagine, is that whatever decisions we make in our private lives are imbued with political implications. Even the seemingly smallest of choices or conversations carry impact.

This is the first thought that occurred to me after John McLaughlin told me why he doesn't directly address the latest governmental strife while he's performing.

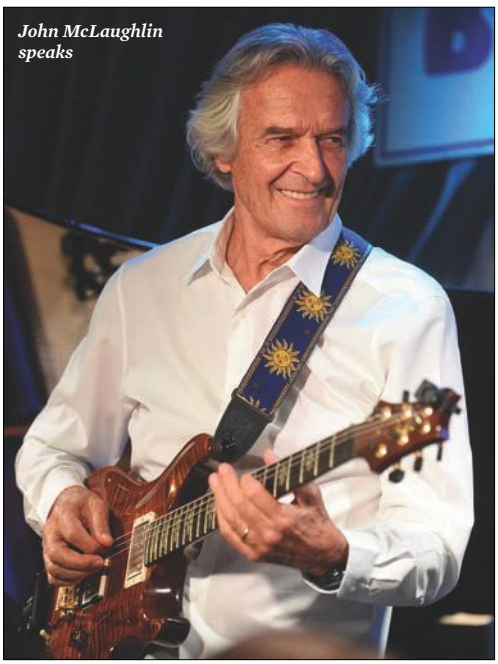
"When I go onstage, the only thing I speak about is my life," he explained. "And the thing is: How deep do I express it? How eloquently do I express it? And with how much love do I express it?—the love that I have for music, for myself, for the people around me and for the world at large. That's all I really have. That's all any musician has."

This statement doesn't mean that he's apolitical. Instead, John recognizes the reverberations of every single note. The minutia matters. We're not just voting with our feet (or the ballot box for that matter), but through every small decision we make in our lives.

If we all keep this in mind, then we can start to effect the change we feel is necessary (or at times, a vigorous affirmation of the status quo). Not only that, but it can prevent us from feeling disempowered or disenfranchised.

This, of course, is not to discourage anyone from direct action or peaceful protest.

In recent days, I've seen Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas take a knee on the



John McLaughlin speaks

House floor. I've watched Eddie Vedder, Roger Waters and Dave Matthews all do the same in solidarity with NFL players. For all I know, by the time this issue is in your hands, some audience members at a particular event will have matched them. Of course, other audience members will have refrained, which is part of the larger point because this country's fundamental tenets of free expression protect either action.

What's more, I think it's important to acknowledge the role of nonviolent resistance.

Since we think of this as our "back to school" issue, please endure a brief refresher course. On Feb. 1, 1960, four students at North Carolina A&T sat down and ordered coffee at a segregated lunch counter at a Woolworth's in Greensboro. When they were denied service, the four returned the following day in the face of vitriol and aggression. Their courage soon inspired similar protests, which yielded both public awareness and constructive results.

The same is true of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in which some individuals opted to walk many miles to their workplaces for over a year in a protracted but ultimately successful attempt to end discriminatory practices in public transit.

Beyond that, on the subject of direct political engagement, please remember that while much of the recent media focus has been on our national political leaders, most of the decisions that directly impact our daily lives occur on a local level with state and municipal governments.

Please stay attuned to what's happening there, lend your voice and possibly the rest of you as well (on a committee or perhaps in an elected office).

After all, the political is personal.

In speaking with John McLaughlin—who will begin his final U.S. tour in November on a bill with Jimmy Herring, which I heartily recommend you attend—he noted that, ultimately, what's most important for audiences is to understand "how deeply you care about what you're doing and about how you're playing and about the love that's in the band" because "in the end, they want to hear a story."

So take care and be aware when writing your own story.

The personal is political.

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ON THE COVER

Ina McLaughlin shot Jimmy Herring and John McLaughlin; Jay Blakesberg shot Mickey Hart and Twiddle; Graham MacIndoe shot The National; Paul Haggard shot Les Claypool; and Laura Partain shot Deer Tick.

The CAPITOL Theatre

OCTOBER
06 DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS w/ STRAND OF OAKS
07 THIRD EYE BLIND
13-14 MODEST MOUSE w/ MIMICKING BIRDS
20-21 UMPHREY'S MCGEE
w/ SINKANE ON 10/20 - w/ SPACE BACON ON 10/21
24 PORTUGAL. THE MAN w/ LIDO
25 ZZ TOP w/ THE SLIM KINGS
29 PRIMUS AMBUSHING THE STORM TOUR
30 311 w/ SHINOBI NINJA
31 PHIL LESH & FRIENDS
w/ SPECIAL GUESTS NICKI BLUHM, ROBERT RANDOLPH & PRESERVATION HALL JAZZ BAND
FT. ROB BARRACO, ROSS JAMES, ALEX KOFORD & GRAHAME LESH
| SOLD OUT

NOVEMBER
01 GRIZ w/ OPIUO + MUZZY BEARR
03 CHRIS ROBINSON BROTHERHOOD
04 JOHN MCLAUGHLIN & JIMMY HERRING
A MEETING OF THE SPIRITS: MUSIC OF MAHAVISHNU ORCHESTRA
05 THE SHINS w/ BAIO
08 TENTH ANNIVERSARY TOUR
RODRIGO Y GABRIELA w/ MARC SCIBILIA
09 TOM SEGURA NO TEETH NO ENTRY TOUR
10 SHERYL CROW | SOLD OUT
11 GET THE LED OUT
15 KING CRIMSON
17 8 TRACK
18 CHEAP TRICK w/ JESSE MALIN
24-25 TWIDDLE
29-30 SQUEEZE

DECEMBER
08 HOT TUNA ELECTRIC FT. STEVE KIMOCK
23 THE BROKEN CROWNS TOUR
MATISYAHU w/ COMMON KINGS + ORPHAN
29-31 THE STRING CHEESE INCIDENT | 12/31 SOLD OUT

JANUARY
12-14 JOE RUSSO'S ALMOST DEAD
17 NEKO CASE w/ MT. JOY

FEBRUARY
24 DIANA KRALL

MARCH
01 SOJA

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FEATURES

54 | Spirited Away
John McLaughlin and **Jimmy Herring** are unquestionably two of the modern-jazz world's most singular voices. So when Herring, who is best known for his work with Widespread Panic and Aquarium Rescue Unit, recorded a version of John McLaughlin's "Hope," which originally appeared on the second Mahavishnu Orchestra album, *Birds of Fire*, it was only a matter of time before these two guitarists struck up a friendship. In advance of their joint tour "The Meeting of the Spirits"—billed as McLaughlin's final extended run—Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** takes a deep-dive into these master improvisers' creative process.

51 | Life After Dead
When **The National** were rising through the New York club ranks, they were considered outsiders in the garage-rock hipster scene that was developing around them. But, almost 20 years after they coalesced in the Lower East Side, these five Cincinnati expats are one of the defining art-rock acts of the indie-rock generation. Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus** recently spent time with the group in Hudson, N.Y., and explores how their uncharacteristic four-year gap between records may help keep The National together for decades to come.

48 | The Art of Acrobatics
In July of 2016, **Twiddle** hosted their first-ever festival, Tumble Down, at Waterfront Park in the group's native Vermont. That year, the band welcomed Phish's Page McConnell to the stage and, in 2017, the Grateful Dead's Phil Lesh sat in with the group. Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** explores Twiddle's journey from the initial meeting of guitarist **Mihali Savoulidis** and keyboard player **Ryan Dempsey** at their college orientation through their latest studio effort.

45 | Deep Into the Blue
Believe it or not, **Slowdive** weren't always considered art-rock royalty, and the term "shoegaze" was actually once a dirty word. But, during their extended break, the members of the band have aged into sonic icons, and the style they helped define has inspired a whole new era of thoughtful, fuzz-friendly alternative acts. Now reunited and playing festivals around the world, Slowdive are finally getting their creative due and have channeled their kinetic energy into a new, highly anticipated self-titled release. **Bill Murphy** peaks behind the curtain of their unexpected second act.

42 | A Gift From a Raven on a Stormy Night
It's been over 20 years since the definitive **Primus** lineup of **Les Claypool**, **Larry LaLonde** and **Tim Alexander** hit the studio to record an album of new, original material. During that time, the members of the alt-funk trio have tried out different band configurations, taken solo excursions and even endured a creative split or two but, with their ninth album, *The Desaturating Seven*, they're finally ready to reembrace their classic, mid-'90s sound. **Ryan Reed** spoke with Claypool and LaLonde about how a serendipitously placed children's book inspired a new LP of goblin-rock.

38 | Double Shot of Deer Tick
Deer Tick have always been known as Rhode Island's rowdiest Americana export, and frontman **John McCauley** wouldn't have it any other way. But, as his friend Stevie Nicks once sang, "time makes you bolder, even children get older" and Deer Tick are ready to dial back the debauchery. As **Jewly Hight** finds out, it took starting a family, moving to Nashville and almost breaking up his band for McCauley to straighten up and set out on a more serious songwriting journey. And the result is a pair of wildly different records.

35 | Hop Making Sense
Now, for something completely different. After over three years of brainstorming, *Relix* is proud to announce a new, fully fermented collaboration with String Cheese Incident keyboardist **Kyle Hollingsworth** and **SweetWater**—our very own beer. Until our new libation hits stores nationally in 2018, we'll track the process in the pages of this magazine and on Relix.com. Our first installment kicks things off on a fifth-generation family farm in Oregon, where Hollingsworth, longtime homebrewer and *Relix* Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick,** and the SweetWater crew select the hops for this process.

Katelzor (Lucius), Morgan Maassen (Johnson), Herb Greene (Grateful Dead)

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DEAR RELIX

Here's what readers are talking about online and offline

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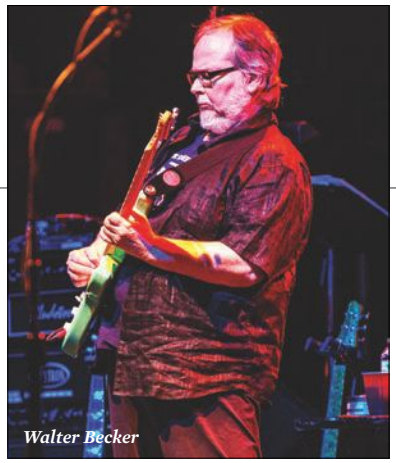
Send your thoughts to letters@relix.com.

REMEMBERING WALTER BECKER

On September 3, Steely Dan co-founder Walter Becker died following an undisclosed illness. He was 67. The stunning news added to an unfortunately lengthy list of musicians who have passed away in 2017. Longtime bandmate and friend Donald Fagen said in a statement that Becker was "smart as a whip, an excellent guitarist and a great songwriter" and that he intends to keep the music of Steely Dan alive. A few weeks before his passing, Becker had missed Steely Dan's recent stadium shows, as part of The Classic West and East, due to what Fagen described at the time as a "procedure."

Becker befriended Fagen in the late-'60s while attending Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. After working as a songwriting duo and touring with Jay and the Americans, Becker and Fagen formed Steely Dan in 1972 and went on to redefine the concept and confines of the classic rock-band configuration. While initially credited as Steely Dan's bassist, Becker made his mark as a multi-instrumentalist, songwriter and arranger; his reclusive nature and studio wizardry helped define the band's mythic ethos. Steely Dan spent most of their seminal years off the road and in the studio, employing dozens of musicians and spiking their jazz-rock sound with elements of blue-eyed soul, R&B and world music. After reuniting in 1993, Becker and Fagen had a second life as a formidable road act.



Walter Becker

Becker's onstage guitar work and humorous, narrative tangents were highlights of Steely Dan's amphitheater runs and stands at more intimate rock palaces like New York's Beacon Theatre. (They even brought storied albums like Gaucho, The Royal Scam *and* Aja *to life during some special full-album re-creations.)*

Warren Haynes also paid his respects to Becker online, calling Steely Dan a "one-of-a-kind group" and noting that "the bar they set for songwriting, both musically and lyrically, was astounding." He also recalled meeting Becker at a New York City rehearsal space: "One story, in particular, he told me that stands out is about him seeing the original Allman Brothers Band at Fillmore East for the first time and how much it blew his mind. I never realized, until that moment, that the ABB's music had made an impact on him—as it had me—as had Steely Dan's."

Here, our readers remember Walter Becker.

The string of albums from *Can't Buy a Thrill* through *Aja* is one of the greatest runs in "rock" history.

Country Fresh via Jambands.com

We all grew up with Steely Dan and have moments in our lives where we can share that music. It feels like a lifelong friend is gone.

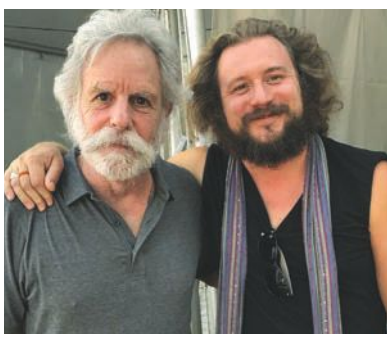
Andrew O'Ferrall via Facebook

A band that had a sound nobody could mimic, lyrics that, in my mind, made no sense, but I continue today to struggle to solve the puzzle—a classic and inventive musical prism that shines whenever and wherever.

Dylan Nickles via Facebook

The music from *Aja* still runs through my head unexpectedly after all these years. Losing Walter Becker, we lost one of the great ones.

Leslie Becker via Facebook

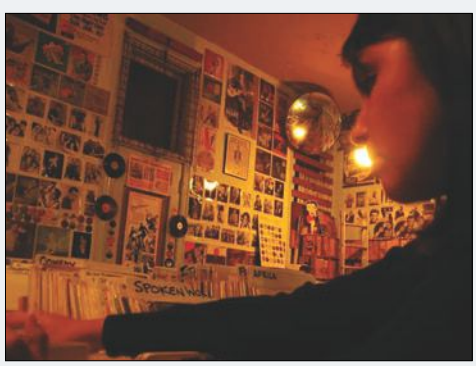


Bill Kelly (Becker)

INSTAPRINT: JIM JAMES

After sharing the stage with Joe Russo's Almost Dead at Lockn' this past August, Jim James' crash course in the Grateful Dead catalog continued post Labor Day with a weekend of appearances alongside Bob Weir. On September 8, the musicians—who first bonded on the traveling Americanarama tour in 2013—shared the stage at Weir's Mill Valley, Calif. outpost Sweetwater Music Hall on tunes like Marvin Gaye's "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)," Daniel Lanois' "The Maker," the Grateful Dead's "Brown-Eyed Women" and "Candyman," and Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" during the My Morning Jacket frontman's set. Then, the following day, Weir joined James at the Bay Area's Sound Summit for another batch of sing-alongs, including a second reading of "The Maker," the Dead's "Brokedown Palace" and Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth." The collaboration clicked and James returned the favor a bit later in the day, emerging during Weir and Phil Lesh's set with the Terrapin Family Band for a version of "Tennessee Jed" that borrowed some bonus lyrics from 2014's *Lost on the River: The New Basement Tapes.*

Later on, James wrote on Instagram (@removador) that it was "great times" with his new pal. "Thanks to [Bob Weir] for joining me for so many adventures and also what an honor to play with Bob and Phil Lesh together."



RECORD STORE PROFILE: JACK'S RECORD CELLAR, SAN FRANCISCO

Some of the best record stores in the world share a very unique, quirky feature: They always look closed. Jack's Record Cellar in San Francisco takes some work to find, but once you crack the code and dig into the selections at the boarded up corner store, you'll find some of the rarest jewels of all. From '50s and '60s jazz and country classics to more modern artists, there is something for everyone in this cavern of music.

FANS.COM PHOTO CONTEST

Warren Haynes performing with Gov't Mule at Patchogue, N.Y.'s Great South Bay Music Festival on July 15, 2017. Photo by Kayla O'Keeffe. Want to be published in *Relix*? Just upload an original photo from a live music event to Relix's Fans.com Photo Contest app. Noted photographer Jay Blakesberg will select the winner from the group of 10 finalists that receives the most votes.

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THE BEAT

THE BEST FROM FESTS & TOURS TODAY

Bob Weir reaffirmed his status as an Americana icon with The Avett Brothers

LOCKN'

AUGUST 24-27
ARRINGTON, VA.

BY MIKE GREENHAUS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN PATRICK GATTA & IAN RAWN

When promoters **Peter Shapiro** and **Dave Frey** launched **Lockn'** in 2013, their initial premise hinged on the blend of interlocking performances and off-the-wall mash-ups that helped spur the original hippie-fest revival in the 1990s. And, while the event's fifth installment boasted four days of near-seamless sets, a slew of sit-ins and some more formal pairings, in recent years, Lockn' has really found its niche as an inspired, jam-scene family campout. At a time when most major gatherings are moving toward anthemic party music and broad, eclectic lineups, Lockn' remains a rare connection to the lightning-in-a-bottle excitement and close-knit community that characterized both Shapiro's Wetlands and Frey's H.O.R.D.E. tour.

Unquestionably, this year's most anticipated reunion was a full-set helping of **Phil Lesh** and **Bob Weir**, who have only shared the stage a handful of times since 2015's Fare Thee Well. The Grateful Dead bandmates were originally just scheduled to take part in a 40TH anniversary celebration of the *Terrapin Station* LP, but their energy was kinetic and their connection was too natural for that lone moment. Weir ended up joining Lesh for his early evening set with **The Terrapin Family Band** on Friday and his Sunday jam session with scene-stalwarts **moe.** On Saturday, they also teamed up for a special moment in the Super VIP Tent that drew in **Joe Russo**, **Grahame Lesh** and others. (The *Terrapin* recreation contained a few rare moments itself, including the seldom-performed "Sunrise" and Robert Hunter's extended, original "Terrapin Station" lyrics.)

With Phil Lesh filling in for bassist Rob Derhak—who is currently undergoing cancer treatment—moe.'s final pre-hiatus show was the weekend's most emotional. However, the group turned in an experimental, uplifting performance and used the opportunity to show off their command of multiple Dead classics, while also featuring Lesh on their own "Silver Sun" and "Four." (Derhak connected

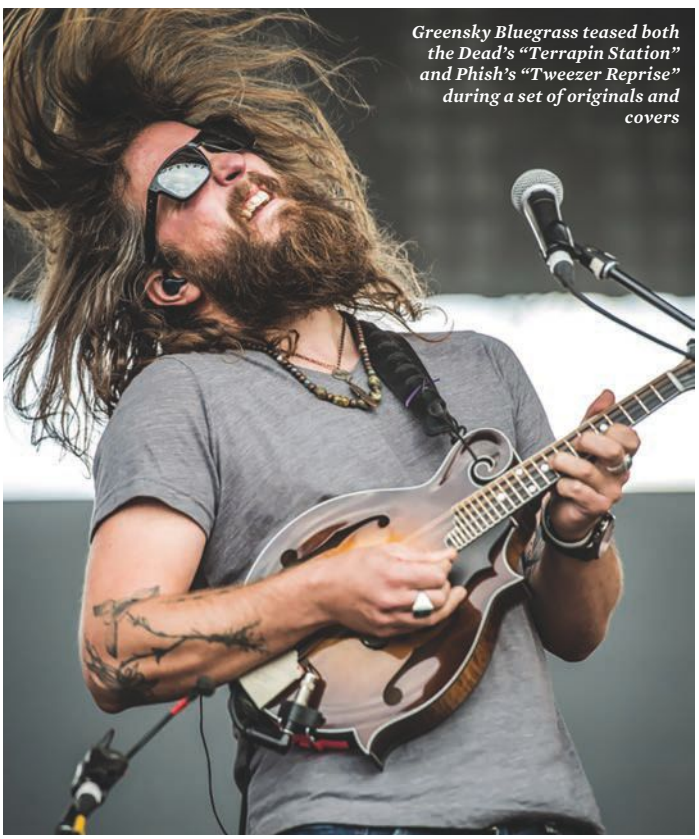
"Terrapin" trio: Bob Weir, Nicki Bluhm, Phil Lesh

Blackberry Smoke made their Lockn' debut in the midst of a summer run with Gov't Mule

with his band from home, FaceTiming with the group before their performance and moving a remote-controlled robot around the stage during their set.) Providing Lockn' with another one of its key collaborations, Weir later sat in with **The Avett Brothers** for a festival-closing set of tunes that spotlighted the Americana side of his catalog.

If Weir and Lesh's onstage and offstage activities highlighted the festival's deep ties to the Dead's ethos, then **Joe Russo's Almost Dead**'s quasi-late-night residency on the festival's *Relix*-branded stage focused on the improvisational community currently coalescing at venues like Shapiro's Brooklyn Bowl. A supergroup that has grown with Lockn', JRAD continues to flip the Dead catalog on its head. They pulled off some unorthodox antics on Friday, such as covering the new Weir original "Gonesville," playing "Help on the Way" and "Slipknot!" without "Franklin's Tower" and winking at their own cover-band tag, thanks to a late-night take on Jane's Addiction's "Been Caught Stealing" with special guest **Jim James**. In perhaps their most ballsy move, the quintet decided to revisit "Terrapin Station" right after the song's architects performed the storied composition. Russo also brought out Weir during his band's Saturday session for an extended sit-in; Weir enjoyed it so much that, after bouncing over to the Super VIP tent to play with DJ Logic, he returned for an unplanned encore appearance on "Samson and Delilah" and "One More Saturday Night."

After slaying Lockn' last year with an electric, cover-heavy My Morning Jacket set that introduced his music to a new legion of fans, Jim James returned to Arrington for the second year in a row to showcase his sensitive acoustic side. Offering a rare solo performance, James stacked his set with softer MMJ staples, protest anthems and his own politically charged originals. He also embraced the Lockn' spirit by inviting out **Brandi Carlile** for "Wonderful (The Way I Feel)," Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" and Plastic Ono Band's "Give Peace a Chance." (Russo, who recently bonded with James at an after-dark set tied to this year's Newport Folk Festival in July, also took part in the sing-along.) James stuck around to sing with Carlile on John Prine's "Angel From Montgomery" and, even more surprising, to front JRAD on not only the Jane's Addiction cover, but also on the Dead's "Brown-Eyed Women" and "Brokedown Palace." Likewise, **Nicole Atkins**, who has been in MMJ's orbit since 2004 and has recently grown into an auxiliary member of JRAD, emerged for "Little Red Rooster," "Cassidy" and the aforementioned "Brokedown Palace," helping to close another of the day's many circles.



Greensky Bluegrass teased both the Dead's "Terrapin Station" and Phish's "Tweezer Reprise" during a set of originals and covers

Of course, the weekend was dotted with some classic "Lockn' moments." This year's highlights included a swirl of **String Cheese Incident** and **Umphrey's McGee** sets on Friday that climaxed with a collaborative take on "Jessica," **Ann Wilson's** run through a selection of Led Zeppelin chestnuts and Heart's own "Magic Man" with **Govt' Mule** and first-time appearances by former Wetlands house bands **Disco Biscuits** and **Antibalas**. Despite scaling back on touring this year, **Widespread Panic** returned to the festival after a year off and surprised the crowd with their first guest-free Lockn' gig. Yet bassist **Dave Schools** still walked away with an impressive Lockn' stat: Along with Lesh and Russo, he is now the only musician to play the Lockn' main stage every summer since its inception.

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LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK

FARM AID

KEYBANK PAVILION
BURGETTSTOWN, PA.
SEPTEMBER 16

Willie Nelson, Lukas Nelson and Sheryl Crow honor the Midnight Rider

John Patrick Gatta

When **Willie Nelson** brought Farm Aid's proceedings to a close on this late-summer Saturday night, he left the stage with the same celebratory-yet-cautious spirit that had guided the benefit show since it kicked off nearly 12 hours earlier. In certain ways, the feeling that life can be good one day and bring hard times the next has encapsulated the event's ethos for the last 32 years.

Farm Aid is often remembered for its big-name performances and special, unexpected collaborations, but Nelson and the rest of the day's organizers made sure to highlight the show's true mission. During a pre-show press conference, musicians and family farmers discussed the importance of tending to the land, while a series of short films presented challenges and encouraging results from new strategies in rural and urban locations. And, throughout the day, concertgoers were able purchase organic, local food items at concession stands and watch a variety of demonstrations in Farm Aid's HOMEGROWN Village.

As per usual, longtime board members Nelson, **Neil Young**, **John Mellencamp** and **Dave Matthews** headlined the show. Mellencamp's set relied heavily on a stable of hits that pre-dated the first Farm Aid in 1985, including fierce versions of "Rain on the Scarecrow" and "Pink Houses," but challenged his fans with political tunes such as "Lawless Times" and "Easy Target." Accompanied by longtime collaborator **Tim Reynolds**, Matthews offered an intense seven-song acoustic set that included Dave Matthews Band favorites "Don't Drink the Water," "Satellite," "Warehouse" and "Mercy." He also used the opportunity to debut a new original song—possibly slated for the new DMB album he teased in a Fam Aid preview—"Do You Remember." Though, at 84, Nelson is finally showing some signs of his age, he loaded his spot with favorites like "Whiskey River," opened up the stage to family members like sons **Lukas** and **Micah** and sister **Bobbie**, and brought out **Jamey Johnson** for a fun reading of his Merle Haggard collaboration "It's All Going to Pot."

Yet, for many, the day's true highlight was the return of Young, who played his first full show since cancelling all of his touring commitments in late 2016. (His only 2017 performance was a cameo with Nelson at Stagecoach Festival in April.) Ending his longest onstage gap since the 1980s, Young and his steady band **Promise of the Real** opened with "Fuckin' Up," a mesmerizing "Cortez the Killer" and a grungy "Cinnamon Girl," before taking an acoustic breather with "Human Highway," "Heart of Gold" and "Comes a Time." He roared back at the end of his slot with politically charged numbers "Like a Hurricane" and "Rockin' in the Free World." Lukas Nelson's wide smile spoke for all 23,000 in attendance.

Farm Aid has always had cross-generational appeal and sought to bring in emerging acts from the roots, country and jam scenes. This year's highlights included Muscle Shoals-meets-Southern-rock troubadours **Blackberry Smoke**, new-generation country singer **Margo Price** and **Jamey Johnson**, whose cover-only set built up to Woody Guthrie's defiant "This Land Is Your Land" through takes on material by The Band, Little Feat, Jerry Reed and Don Williams. **Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats** also provided a mid-show boost with "I Need Never Get Old," "S.O.B." and a take on "Delta Lady." **The Avett Brothers** exploded like a truck full of unstable nitroglycerin. They started with "Laundry Room" and powered through "Ain't No Man," "True Sadness" and "Slight Figure of Speech."

Of course, Farm Aid is never complete without a few choice sit-ins, and this year's first guest appearance took place early on when Price emerged during Lukas Nelson & Promise of the

Real's performance for "Find Yourself." **Jack Johnson** then took that collaborative spirit to another level, inviting Jamey Johnson, Sheryl Crow and Rateliff out for Bob Dylan's "I Shall Be Released." Later, he brought Lukas Nelson onstage for a take on "Breakdown" that was cut with a bit of "Wasting Time" and the members of The Avett Brothers helped bring things to a climax with "Mudfootball" and "Better Together."

Sheryl Crow returned to Farm Aid for the first time since 2003 with a crowd-pleasing performance featuring radio songs like "Everyday Is a Winding Road," "If It Makes You Happy" and a version of "Strong Enough" with Price. She also honored her onetime tour mate Gregg Allman with a rendition of "Midnight Rider" that garnered help from friends like Price, Willie and Lukas Nelson and Jack Johnson.

At the end of Nelson's set, most of the day's performers emerged for takes on "Roll Me Up and Smoke When I Die," a segue from "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" into "I'll Fly Away," "On the Road Again" and an impassioned take on "Living in the Promiseland" that spotlighted the Nelson family's close bond. With Neil Young trading harmonica licks with Nelson's longtime foil, **Mickey Raphael**, the day's proceedings came to a resonant close with poignant takes on "Texas Flood" and "I Saw the Light."

John Patrick Gatta

QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

THE CAPITOL THEATRE
PORT CHESTER, N.Y.
SEPTEMBER 6

Part of The Capitol Theatre's appeal is that, since its resurrection five years ago, it's become a place where bands will try something different—maybe a short residency, sometimes a smaller gig before a festival date, occasionally a warm-up before a much bigger Manhattan show. The **Queens of the Stone Age**'s return to The Cap was the latest in that line. With Madison Square Garden booked at the end of October, this was a chance for fans to see the band in a much more intimate setting, on the first U.S. date of the *Villains* tour, no less.

Josh Homme and Queens of the Stone Age open their Villains *tour at The Cap*

As such, the quick sellout turned into New York's hot ticket of the week. The devilish album artwork projected onto the walls before the gig, and the band plowing through seven of the new album's nine songs, it almost felt like a record-release party. "We're playing a lot of new music tonight, thanks for being open-minded," frontman **Josh Homme** commented.

Of course, the audience was well aware of how precious the tickets were for this gig and remained more than open-minded. They devoured the first three quarters of the show, during which there wasn't much talking, just head-down riffing and wailing—high-on-the-neck, stomping, pummeling riffs, followed by low-on-the-neck, bendy soloing and back again—all, of course, delivered with swagger. That said, when the band dipped into older fare, like with 2005's "Little Sister," the enthusiasm swelled and the crowd erupted.

Of the *Villains* fare, nothing burned brighter that than "The Evil Has Landed," with its raunchy guitar groove powering the tune, before abruptly and thrillingly switching to a scorching march at song's end. It would have worked as a perfect segue into the set-closer, the immortal "No One Knows," if not for a botched intro. Homme actually stopped the band and restarted the tune, which lent something of a dress-rehearsal vibe but also made things feel oddly real and charming. "A Song for the Dead" capped the evening, but not before Homme professed his love to the crowd: "We came here first and you've proven why. I just want to fuck all of you. And I just hope that's alright." ***Wes Orshoski***

STEVE WINWOOD

ELLIE CAULKINS OPERA HOUSE
DENVER, COLO.
SEPTEMBER 16

On a pleasant September evening shortly after the release of his new, live hits collection, **Steve Winwood** stopped in Colorado's capitol for a performance at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House. The venue rarely hosts rock concerts, but the wood-paneled setting served dutifully, offering its top-notch acoustics.

Opener **Cris Jacobs** powered through an impressive set driven by his bluesy vocals and thoughtful originals. An accomplished guitarist, his final two selections featured a unique three-string, cigar-box-shaped instrument. Jacobs closed with a triumphant version of the Grateful Dead staple "Samson and Delilah."

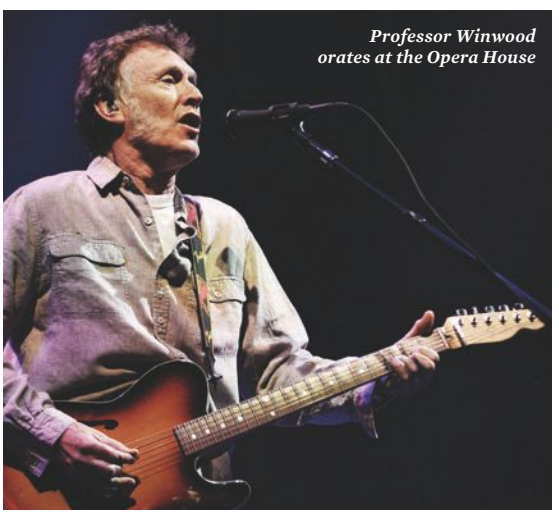
Winwood took the stage without an introduction—in fact, the house lights were still on when he and his band walked on. Still defying time with his youthful looks and reliable Oxford shirt, jeans and shiny brown suede shoes, he retains the look of a relaxed college professor about to give a lecture.

Opening with the pumping groove of the Spencer Davis Group classic, "I'm a Man," Winwood moved forward in time with two more recent numbers, "Fly" and "At Times We Do Forget," emphasizing his quintet's Latin jazz and groove capabilities. His touring band did not include a bass player—instead, Winwood played the bass lines with his left foot on the pedals of his Hammond B-3 organ. While this proved effective, it didn't always provide for a complete range of band dynamics.

The evening was stacked with highlights: Traffic's hypnotic jazz-rock opus, "The Low Spark of High-Heeled Boys," showcased the stellar chops of Winwood's backing band. "Empty Pages" was a delight, as was a long, trippy version of "Light Up or Leave Me Alone." He closed the set with a rootsy version of his biggest solo hit, "Higher Love."

By the time Winwood encored with two of his best-known tunes—"Dear Mr. Fantasy" and "Gimme Some Lovin'"—the crowd's enthusiastic response made it clear that, even though the show clocked in at an hour and forty-five minutes, given such a vast and amazing repertoire, they would have loved to hear more.

Roger Len Smith



Professor Winwood orates at the Opera House

Wes Orshoski (Queens of the Stone Age), Scarlatti (Winwood)

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THE MAGPIE SALUTE

FONDA THEATRE
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.
SEPTEMBER 13

Rich Robinson made no apologies. Late in **The Magpie Salute**'s first appearance in Los Angeles, the guitarist summarized the motives of his new 10-piece ensemble: to play the songs he wrote, the songs his bandmate **Marc Ford** wrote and the songs they loved growing up. The near-capacity crowd roared in appreciation.

The turbulent tide of Robinson's time with The Black Crowes, a group he founded with his brother and lead singer, Chris, is just Magpie's prologue. Leading off the nearly two-and-a-half hour set with a trio of Crowes rockers, Robinson seemed intent on reaffirming his rightful place in the creative history of that group. He's also stocked this outfit with the familiar faces of several former Crowes—guitarist Ford, bassist **Sven Pipien** and harmony vocalist **Charity White**. Still, it's the man in the middle, singer **John Hogg**, who stood in perhaps the longest shadow of the multi-platinum band. With his crackled rasp and bluesman's weary vocals, time and again, Hogg rose assertively above the triple-guitar frontline, driving the opening "My Morning Song" and the second-line groove of "Another Roadside Tragedy." Following "Sting Me," laced with barrelhouse piano, came a blistering "Omission," the Magpie's lone original. By the time Hogg ceded to Ford for the guitarist's "Idle Time," he left no doubt of his ability to carry even the most iconic melodies.

Robinson also sang a few tunes, first on his "Which Way Your Wind Blows" and then on "All Along the Way." The latter came as part of a mid-show acoustic mini-set, with Ford's wife **Kirsten** guesting on "Shining Again." The guitar conversations between Robinson and Ford were as reciprocal and ignitable as they were two decades earlier. The Crowes' classic "Wiser Time" slowly emerged as a transition back to the electric lineup, ascending to the show's zenith—an impassioned reading of Velvet Underground's "Oh! Sweet Nuthin'." Robinson conveyed Lou Reed's plaintive ballad in faded brilliance, buttressing a final third of the evening, saturated in the thick overdrive of "Black Cloud" and contrasting glockenspiel accents of "Horsehead."

At the show's looming conclusion, Robinson declined to exit and reenter the stage for a customary encore. Instead, he took the opportunity to recall an earlier night on the tour when a front-row fan begged for Robinson to acknowledge his T-shirt, which sported the logo of his combative sibling's Chris Robinson Brotherhood. It was all fun, said Robinson.

On a finale of the Crowes' "Soul Singing," the collision of past and present came into sharp focus. Hogg, beaming as the former Crowes guitarists' interlocking riffs rang out in tandem, stomped and clapped as the drums pounded. The harmony singers swayed, joyously singing the resounding chorus. The Magpie Salute was soaring, high above the fray.

Larson Sutton

JACKIE GREENE & FRIENDS: GRATEFUL DEAD APPRECIATION NIGHT

BROOKLYN BOWL
BROOKLYN, N.Y.
SEPTEMBER 14

Jackie Greene has been a part of the extended Grateful Dead family since he first shared the stage

The Mapgie Salute make their LA debut

Renee Silverman

Al Schnier, Jon Cornell, Leslie Mendelson and Jackie Greene appreciate the Grateful Dead

Marc Millman

with Phil Lesh & Friends just over a decade ago and, even as he hones his own career, he continues to celebrate the Deadhead community that has adopted him as their own. His latest nod was a special Grateful Dead appreciation show benefiting Rock and Wrap It Up's efforts to combat hunger and poverty. Throughout the show, Greene performed with a "friends" ensemble of his own, which highlighted the deep connections he's made to the jamband world during the past 10 years: keyboardist **Jeff Chimenti**, bassist **Jon Cornell**, drummer **Fitz Harris**, singer **Leslie Mendelson**, and guitarists **Al Schnier**, **Mihali Savoulidis**, **Scott Sharrard** and **Nathan Dale**.

The band kicked off with "Bertha," a typical Grateful Dead opener that allowed Greene to channel the country-rock corner of Jerry Garcia's catalog with a telecaster in tow. From the beginning, there was clear evidence of what was to come: energy, excitement and guitar solos. In fact, the majority of his guests were guitar players and, at times, all five players were on stage taking turns. If extended solos, perfect twin guitars and intense jamming are not your thing, then you were at the wrong venue. Could it have been too much? Maybe, but judging by the crowd's reaction, they surely didn't mind.

While the guitars were the focal point, the drums and bass quickly began playing catch up, and they finally hit their stride midway through the first set, during a rousing rendition of "Scarlet Begonias" into "Fire on the Mountain." A bit later, Chimenti showed his appreciation for his bandmates by ceasing to play the keys, instead sipping his beer while watching Cornell take a bass solo.

Mendelson—who has shared the stage with Greene in the past—supplied lead vocals on "Scarlet," bringing a sweetness to the music that is not always evident in tributes to the Dead. Yet, what set this performance apart from other nights honoring the Grateful Dead was not the repertoire (which was well chosen), or the musicianship, but the evening's overall Muscle Shoals-meets-the-music-of-the-Dead ethos. Greene and his collaborators recast "So Many Roads" as a pseudo gospel number, while the intro to "Jack Straw" felt akin to the Allman Brothers Band's signature ballad "Melissa." They reinforced this Southern spirit even more when Sharrard—the musical director of Gregg Allman's final solo group—led the outfit in a grooving version of the Allman Brothers' "Don't Keep Me Wonderin'." At times, Greene may as well have hired a gospel choir to sway in the background. ***Luke Roland***

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1 Hunter & the Dirty Jacks

"Salt Whiskey"
From the album *Single Barrel*
Spectra Music Group

Hunter & The Dirty Jacks are California-crafted rock-and-roll featuring frontman Hunter Ackerman, guitar players Carmelo Bonaventura and Jon Siembieda, bassist Aaron Barnes and drummer Brian Lara. Signed to Spectra Music Group, the album Single Barrel is on 400+ radio stations while the band performs 120 shows per year.

hunterandthedirtyjacks.com

2 The Chris O'Leary Band

"Harvest Time"
From the album *Gonna Die Tryin*
American Showplace

The critically acclaimed, award-winning Chris O'Leary Band is a rising star on today's blues scene. Chris cut his teeth playing with the legendary Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Levon Helm for six years. During this time, Chris toured internationally and took up residency in New Orleans for the better part of a year. It's here where he absorbed the various styles that form the eclectic roots sound of the band.

thechrisolearyband.net

3 The Price Sisters

"What Does the Deep Sea Say"
From the album *The Price Sisters*
Rebel Records

Rebel Records recording artists, The Price Sisters, features twin sisters Lauren Price and Leanna Price. Inspired by pioneer Bill Monroe, the group produces a fresh, original sound,which manages to capture and carry forth the essence of the style laid down by the forerunners of bluegrass and traditional music. Both of their Rebel recordings have been produced by Bil VornDick.

thepricesisters.com

4 Ron Holloway Band

"Three Miles Down"
(Composed by Gil Scott Heron)
From the album *Groove Update*
Concord/Milestone

Perhaps you've heard Ron Holloway with The Warren Haynes Band, The Susan Tedeschi Band, Dizzy Gillespie, Gil Scott-Heron or Root Boy Slim. He currently leads The Ron Holloway Band, a seven-piece, saxy, funk machine, combining sax-driven jams, soaring female vocals, intensely emotive guitar and hard-hitting grooves to deliver a full-on funky, rocking show!

concordmusicgroup.com/albums/groove-update

5 18 Strings

"Little Warrior"
From the album *18 Strings*
Mon Hills Records

18 Strings is an acoustic string trio based in Morgantown, W.V. The three members come from different musical backgrounds, spanning everything from jazz to folk and rock to classical. The result is a seamless fusion of styles that incorporates smart songwriting, tight harmonies, refined instrumental technique and an airtight groove.

18strings.net

6 Larry McCray

"Can't You See" ft. Dickie Betts
From the album
The Gibson Sessions
Magnolia Records

Veteran blues virtuoso Larry McCray is a Michigan-based, Arkansas native following in the footsteps of the "Three Kings of Blues." His ninth album, The Gibson Sessions is an electrifying journey through some of his favorite rock-and-roll classics, featuring Derek Trucks, Dickey Betts, and Jimmy Herring

larrymccray.net

7 Never Ending Fall

"Hold Tight"
From the album *Start Livin*
Self-released

The Never Ending Fall from Baltimore, are a group of funky indie-rockers who just released their sophomore LP, Start Livin. They deliver bright, layered indie-pop-rock tracks to funky, ska/punk and reggae-infused jams, all of it utterly singable and danceable. Their first album, 2015's self-titled, established the close-knit group as one to watch!

nefdaily.com

8 Wreck Loose

"Long Time Listener, First Time Caller"
From the album *OK, Wreck Loose*
Self-released

Wreck Loose is a piano pop-rock quartet from Pittsburgh. Their full-length debut, *OK, Wreck Loose*, mixes bombastic arena-rock hooks with quirky and introspective lyrics. Their songs tell big stories about little people, including pro wrestlers, werewolves and the Statue of Liberty.

wrecklooseband.com

9 Frank Bang & The Cook County Kings

"Possum in My Tree"
From the album *The Blues Don't Care*
Cleopatra Blues/Blue Hoss

Frank Bang & The Cook County Kings are Chicago Blues at it finest. Frank Bang, born in Chicago, worked his way up through the ranks to play with legendary blues master Buddy Guy. With Buddy Guy, Frank has shared the stage with Eric Clapton, Dave Matthews, Carlos Santana and Robert Plant, to name a few.

frankbang.net/frankbang/

10 Wild Love

"Settle Down"
From the album *Where Do We Go From Here?*
Self-Released

Wild Love is a multinational pop-rock band from Nashville. Featuring addictive hooks and stunning vocal melodies, they push the boundaries. The lineup of Brandon Gorman, Si Gecener, Joey Burcham and Nolan Speer deliver an explosive live performance full of energy and singalongs that will leave their audiences wanting more.

wearewildlove.com

11 Kat Myers & The Buzzards

"Under the Rug"
From the EP *Owe Everybody Money*
Nest Egg Records

The debut EP from indie-Americana quartet Kat Myers & The Buzzards, Owe Everybody Money, mixed by Vance Powell (Jack White, Chris Stapleton, Sturgill Simpson), is a timeless, country-tinged rock-and-roll record full of lyrical wit, sun-scattered harmonies and rolling guitar hooks.

katmyersandthebuzzards.com

12 Dylan Jane

"Riverbed"
From the album *Deceiving Yourself and Everyone Else*
Self-released

Dylan Jane is a Philadelphia-based artist backed by a rotation of players that help make her sound a living, breathing thing. With a careful attention to lyricism and a devastatingly vulnerable approach to songwriting, she continues to capture the hearts of listeners, both solo and with her band.

dylanjanemusic.com

13 The Space Cats

"Furra"
From the album *Golden City*
Self-released

The Space Cats are a Philadelphia-based instrumental-rock quartet. Their music seamlessly blends progressive-rock compositions, dense atmospheres, ripping guitar and synth solos, and improvisation. Venturing through key changes, heavy funk and thematic peaks, The Space Cats' live performances offer an unpredictable and powerful experience.

thespacecats.com

14 Kit & The Chardonnay Boys

"It's Gonna Hit the Youth"
Single
Self-released

Kit & The Chardonnay Boys are coming at you, crisp and high in tannins. Best served in stemless glasses with bagel chips and chèvre on the side, these micro-dosing, mimosa-pouring, Parliament-smoking rock-and-rollers are reverb-vintage soundscapers with psychedelic-pop and roots blues in their veins, but have a strong penchant for yacht rock.

thechardonnayboys.com

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ANTIBALAS

After nearly 20 years together, Brooklyn's seasoned Afrobeat aces are still crafting vibrant music with a poignant message. *By* **BILL MURPHY**

IT ISN'T A SECRET that in fraught political times, music is often a source of solace, strength and inspiration. Duke Amayo knows the script intimately; as the British-born son of Nigerian parents, he grew up on the Afrobeat grooves of Fela Anikulapo Kuti, whose smoldering, funk-fueled excursions with his bands Afrika 70 and Egypt 80 were the weaponized soundtrack of resistance against a corrupt Lagos regime. To this day, Amayo still feels Fela's influence as a benevolent spirit guide and father figure, while carving out a path of his own as the frontman for Antibalas, the 12-piece Brooklyn-based Afrobeat collective he joined back in 1999.

"Fela was the champion of the youth at that time," Amayo says, reflecting on his childhood in Lagos, "so that was probably the most important time for me. But you know, the only reason why Fela was popular was because it was very personal for him. He was dealing with something real, so you could feel it coming out. Since we live in different times, you've gotta paint a different picture. Now, instead of going into a song with a blame game, you start a dialogue about political issues. Then you can get to the regular guy, to the factory worker or the war veteran or the teacher. You're making it visual for the listener, and because you're thinking long view, eventually, someone who wants to take a long drive will understand you. I always love that. It could take someone five years to figure it out—like, 'Oh yeah, *that's* what he was trying to say!' That's how we marinate."

Indeed, it's been five years since Antibalas released their self-titled fifth album, which arrived on the heels of the band's much-touted tenure with the Bill T. Jones-produced Broadway musical *Fela!* The album led off with "Dirty Money," a Lagos-style dance jam that calls hyper-capitalism and income inequality into question, without sounding preachy.

Recorded by longtime friend and Dap-Kings co-founder Gabriel Roth and released on the Daptone label, *Antibalas* was meant to be a breakthrough. When critical acclaim didn't translate into sales, it took another three years of occasional touring and special appearances (including stints as the house band at Carnegie Hall tributes to Paul Simon, David Byrne and Talking Heads, Bill Withers and most recently, Aretha Franklin) before the band members again found themselves in a recording studio in the spring of 2016, ready to begin anew.

Martín Perna, who founded Antibalas in 1997 and plays baritone saxophone in the band's world-renowned horn section, comes across as sanguine when asked about the band's fortunes. "I think because of where we are as a band—partially out of financial necessity, but also because we're well-rounded musicians and we're fluent in a lot of different musical languages—we do this other stuff and then we come back," he says. "That informs how we play and maybe makes us a little bit wiser. Sometimes we bring it directly into the group, but to everyone's credit, they also realize what belongs to someone else and what's particularly important for Antibalas."

In that context, *Where the Gods Are in Peace*, the band's latest outing on Daptone, is a triumphant concept album with origins that meander back many years. In the typical Afrobeat tradition, the music boils over with improvisational fervor and Afro-futurist leanings, with the three-part epic "Tombstown" (which features guest backing vocals by Marie Daulne of Zap Mama) providing the lyric that gives the album its title. Tastes of hip-hop, funk and Latin soul-jazz rear up throughout—a constant reminder of the band's thick Brooklyn roots.

"We're always gonna be a Brooklyn band," says bassist and co-producer Nikhil P. Yerawadekar, who originally joined the ranks as a guitarist in 2008 before switching instruments in 2010. "Personally, it's a bit of a strange thing because, though the band started out in Williamsburg, today that area doesn't feel like what I've grown up thinking Brooklyn is all about. What we're trying to do with this band is the antithesis of toppling something down and building something brand new over it. It's about allowing something to grow fully over time. But we're making crazy-ass music in Brooklyn and, to me, that's part of doing what we're supposed to do as Brooklynites. We're just trying to be really expressive."

The album opens with the 10-minute workout "Gold Rush," which started as an instrumental on the band's 2012 tour and morphed into a call for social justice for indigenous people worldwide. The hypnotically funky "Hook & Crook" originally had a dancehall feel, inspired by one of Amayo's visits to Lagos and, in particular, to the Permaculture Garden in the port town of Badagry.

The name "Tombstown" occurred to Amayo while walking past the Père Lachaise Cemetary in Paris and, prior to this album, the group tried tracking a version of the song for 2007's *Security*. Amayo found the strength to revisit the song shortly after his mother passed away, transforming it into a roiling opera of lush green islands, alien cowboys, flaming chariots and distant lands populated by omnipotent gods. And throughout, all the musicians in the band play with their ears wide open and a natural, near-teleapathetic connection that comes from years of touring together.

"When we're onstage, you can actually hear the communication going on with all the parts," Amayo explains. "And the parts in the orchestra are the meat in the song. It's like a teaching tool for us all because if you don't go into that trance—even as a musician, when you're playing—you want to get a point where you can play one or two notes, where you can get everything else. It's sitting so nicely that you don't want to go anywhere. We all get there, and when we do, it's like, 'I don't want to play anything more.' You're feeling the oneness of whatever you're doing. You're locked in with someone, and you start understanding the limitless beauty of that."

MICKEY HART

For *RAMU*, his first studio album since before Fare Thee Well, the Grateful Dead's global-music scholar fuses his trademark percussive dance beats, a set of fresh Robert Hunter lyrics and some lost Jerry Garcia recordings with the help of Tank and the Bangas' Tarriona "Tank" Ball, Animal Collective's Avey Tare and many others. *By* **MIKE GREENHAUS**

ON THE HIGH SEAS

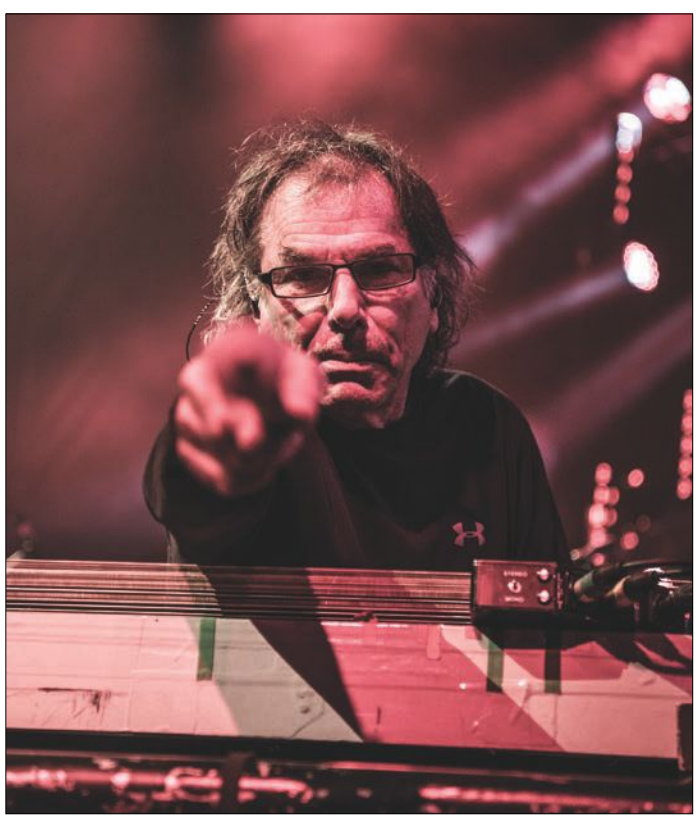
With *RAMU*, it feels like I've been out on the high seas for three and a half years. The winds, the rain, the laughter—all of that goes with long-distance recording. And it was eventful, quite a journey. It started off as a dance version of a percussion record with these exotic instruments and wound up differently as a song record. I don't think I've worked on a recording this intense before and I've been part of a lot of them. This one is filled with lots of detail, lots of wonderful grooves.

And then, [Robert] Hunter delivered what I consider the motherload. Once he started throwing these lyrics across my bow, there was no way I could look back. They were so *there*; they said everything I wanted to say. This was through all of the Trump madness and all of that leading up to it. And when Trump came along, well, that was my greatest inspiration.

MAKING AMERICA GRATEFUL AGAIN

The damndest thing about Hunter is he writes from a place that's very prophetic. He could write about something that you don't really understand—metaphorically or otherwise—just beautiful prose and poems and wordplay. And then, all of a sudden, you run into a situation that you can't explain in life and one of Hunter's lines explains it perfectly. *That* is genius; that is magic. So when you're faced with that, you can't turn away from it. It's just like the Grateful Dead—once you see those words, the music flows. And the words become part of the music. I call it "the magic." It's dangerous stuff because you don't know where it will lead, but I like danger in music. There should be a struggle to it. It should have everything that life contains.

And then, all of a sudden, Trump came around and, my God, I can't imagine any artist not being inspired by Mr. Trump. He's gut-wrenching. So I started to scream, and the only way I scream is through the music. Hunter wrote a lot of this stuff before Trump—I don't see it as being totally political, although it says things about politics and about all of the things that I find amazingly destructive, disturbing and life-threatening about the existence of somebody like a Mr. Trump. He comes from a place that inspires the best in you, actually. How can you fight something like that? How can you live with it? How can you turn that energy into something good? Trump had a great influence on me—not necessarily in the best of ways.



OLD, AND NOT IN THE WAY

The other part of this album is just feel-good dance music. My attempts to mix lyrics and dance music have been semi-successful in my mind, some more than others. But that's not been my forte. As you know, percussion and bass music are my first loves. This record has a lot of rhythm. Zakir Hussain, Giovanni Hidalgo, Sikiru Adepoju—all of my *Planet Drum* mates—are all over this. And now, in the days where digital technology has caught up, you can actually perform on these robots and sound droids using the latest technology; combine that with many of my pet sounds from over the years that I've been holding and saving—things I'm emotionally tied to, whether they be grooves, sounds or rhythms—and *voila*! I also reached back in history to some of my favorite archival recordings from over the years that I've fallen on.

As a trustee at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, I'm exposed to the world's music. And also, I'm on the board of directors at Smithsonian Folkways. So I was able to embed these amazing sounds from the past in this new electric music. I took an old 1944 Alan Lomax recording from Tampa, Florida for "WINE, WINE, WINE," and "Auctioneers" was a recording of an auctioneer selling tobacco. I'm hoping to bring awareness to these recordings from around the world.

Someday, I'd like to take *RAMU* on the road—take it out to sea and see what it does. Thinking about when I go out live, I might want to use Jason [Hann of The String Cheese Incident and EOTO] because of his electronic sensibilities and also because of his very powerful backbeat. I've played with Jason over the years, and he's joined The Rhythm Devils a few times—he's a solid drummer. I asked him to come in and do a little double drumming, pepper the record and reinforce my parts—that added a little more weight to them.

PURE JERRY

Jerry and I both liked the studio. He would come out to my place and just pick. And, of course, when you come to my place, it's about recording. I was the first one of us to have

Jay Blakesberg

"The damndest thing about Hunter is he writes from a place that's very prophetic," Hart says of his longtime friend.

Jay Blakesberg

a studio back in the late-'60s, even though we didn't have any money. So around '86 or '87, when he started learning his new MIDI guitar, he'd come over and just pick. I would be turning knobs and he'd be sitting there, playing and responding to what we called "the scroll," which is just moving through sounds until we'd find the ones that we loved.

Walter Cronkite was a dear friend of mine for 27 years, and he asked me to do this thing for the America's Cup in 1987. So I called up Jerry, Carlos Santana and Zakir Hussain, and we had these sessions around the same time. I forgot about the recordings until one of my archivists found all of these beautiful Jerry tracks. I brought those back into two songs ["Time Beyond Reason" and "Jerry"]. So you can hear his sweet guitar *and* the MIDI signal, which could be a bassoon, a flute or other instruments. You can look at Jerry as indigenous, in a way.

PET SOUNDS

I have these miniature donkeys [on my property], and they make these amazing sounds. We have a pond with a frog and I have my Sony recorder with me almost all the time, recording everything. I think there are 30 of my field recordings in the Mickey Hart Collection at the Smithsonian. You can find out everything about a culture through its music—like talking books. That has always been a fond thing for me.

My mom had inherited a Count Basie/Duke Ellington collection from one of her relatives, and in the middle of it were these 78s—it was pygmy music, rainforest music from Africa and so forth. I fell in love with those charming, out-of-tune voices—they never let me go. When I was a kid, I was foraging and hunting, and, like the pygmies, I took on that persona. Even though I was young and didn't understand why, I was attracted to it. The walls used to just disappear. I lived in a very small place. When you put these recordings on, you transform into a whole other person, a whole other being.

TAKING IT TO THE FINISH LINE

Dave [Portner, who records as Avey Tare] has such a beautiful, smooth voice and is such a nice fellow. I really like Animal Collective [and they were the first outside artists to receive a license to sample the Grateful Dead] so he was tapped to give a voice to these recordings. And he just fell in with Hunter. He understood those words, felt it deeply. Hunter's style is not for everybody; only for the few who really have the passion. So we had a few sessions and he worked perfectly. It was just a joyful experience.

And then there was Tank [Ball], who was a recent addition right toward the end. I wanted more of a female energy in these recordings; it was getting so male that I needed that to balance it out in order to get a clearer picture of humanity. She's a brilliant, young lady. She nailed it; we co-composed some of the words. And she interpreted Hunter perfectly. She does what they call "slam poetry," which is spoken-word but *fast*. She's like a machine gun. She also has this lovely side—her voice is so expressive, just like Dave's. They both have this wonderful emotional hit to the sound of their voice. They

Continued on page 73

MIKE GREISCH

By BRADLEY TUCKER

IF YOU'VE BEEN to a Phish, Dave Matthews Band, Ray LaMontagne, Trey Anastasio Band or Dave & Tim show in recent years, then you've seen Mike Greisch in action. Greisch—who is currently with the Paradigm Talent Agency—worked with powerhouse agent and industry giant Chip Hooper until his passing in 2016 and is now responsible for some of his biggest clients.

This summer, the Chicago-bred Greisch was also part of the close-knit team that brought Phish's historic 13-night Baker's Dozen residency at New York's Madison Square Garden to fruition. Though he's humble about his recent accomplishment, stating, "for the Baker's Dozen, all the credit goes to the band," Greisch played a key role in planning the shows and notes that sometimes he's working on his biggest events two years before fans walk into the show.

Was there a venue that you frequented growing up in Chicago?
For the most part, it was the Metro and the Vic. My buddy Billy's brother did merch at the Metro, and he also managed a couple of young local bands in Chicago. I was in junior high school and he was much older, but he would get us into shows. So, even though it was limited exposure, he was my introduction to the business side of it.

At that point, was there something in the music business that you were interested in?
Selling merch was the thing that interested me because that was my first exposure. Billy's brother would have us behind the merch table before the show, setting up the hangers and tables. As a 13-year-old kid, it was cool to just handle the merch and help set it up—I knew I wanted to be in the music business. The summer after my sophomore year of college, I got an internship working for Aware [Records] and that's when I met Mark Cunningham and Gregg Latterman, who were managing Brandi Carlile. I started doing merch for Brandi and, essentially, helping wherever I could on one of her early tours.

By the time I graduated from college, I knew I wanted to be an agent. So I slowly made my way to California, via Colorado, and just started beating down the doors at all the agencies, but Monterey [Peninsula Artists] was always in the back of my mind from my time at Aware. I was sending stuff to MPA on behalf of Brandi, even though I didn't really know that much about the music business when I started. Mark got me an interview with Chip [Hooper] and I worked at Monterey until 2016.

Can you describe an early influence on your career?
I've been extremely lucky to work with, and for, so many great people—Chip, Dan Weiner, Duffy McSwiggin and all the managers. I also learned so much from Gregg Latterman and Mark Cunningham because I was so green during that internship—it was the classic thing of being a sponge and taking everything in. I was just a blank canvas and trying to absorb as much as I could. But obviously, Chip has had more of an influence on me than anybody else, and I was lucky to meet him and work with him when I did.

Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with Chip?
My first assistant job after a couple of mail-room-type jobs was with Duffy McSwiggin. I was his assistant for a couple of years. He had been Chip's assistant years before. So there was a natural progression of a relationship, where I got to know Chip through Duffy as Duffy's assistant. But Chip and I quickly developed a good personal relationship before a working relationship. And then, when he needed a booking coordinator, I jumped at the chance and we worked side-by-side for those next three years. When I was promoted to an agent, Chip said, "You're an agent now, but do you want to come work on my bands with me?" Obviously, I jumped at the opportunity to do that as well.

CID Entertainment founder Dan Berkowitz and Greisch outside one of Phish's Baker's Dozen shows.

How did it feel to take the lead with so many of his bands after he passed away?
It was a natural transition. We have an amazing team—Dan Weiner is involved, Paul Morris is involved, all the agents here. It's really a team effort and it does take a lot of people to fill Chip's shoes, which are really unfillable. He was smart and forward-thinking about the whole thing and, when he passed, the transition was relatively smooth because he had set it up to be that way.

What's the best part about your job and what's the worst part about your job?
I love the people I work with, from the other agents at Paradigm to the artist managers. I work with some of the best tour managers in the world—Geoff Trump, Richard Glasgow. Having an impact on live music and culture, however small or large it may be, is super rewarding. And seeing artists achieve their full potential and their dreams is the best thing in the world. I don't even know if it's the worst part about my job, but [the hardest part] is the fact that you can never turn it off—it's 24/7, 365 days. My wife minds it more than I do.

It's a relationship business—you have to build those relationships and they're developed in person. You have to stay on top of everything in general. We're all very lucky to have the jobs that we have, and there's always a thousand people that would gladly take your job or want your job—and that's motivation on some level. You have to be in it 100 percent.

FOSTER THE PEOPLE

By MIKE GREENHAUS

ISOM INNIS HAS a day left of his "summer vacation" between albums, and the Foster the People multi-instrumentalist plans to use his final hours of downtime wisely—by staying as close to home as possible. "We're shooting a couple of videos tomorrow and the next day, and then we head over to Budapest for our first show," Innis says with a palpable sense of excitement. "So I'm kind of soaking up as much as I can in my apartment."

It's a hot, late-June afternoon and the Los Angeles-based musican is getting ready to kick off the next era of Foster the People's career in support of *Sacred Hearts Club*, their third LP and first since 2014's alt-rock chart-topper, *Supermodel*. The band's founder and namesake Mark Foster initially conceived *Sacred Hearts Club* as his group's '60s/'70s-inspired, psychedelic-rock opus, but the album quickly took a turn and ended up as a genre-crossing, playlist-approved blend of styles very much in-line with this season's festival sound. So it isn't surprising that Innis has A Tribe Called Quest's own freeform comeback, *We Got It from Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* on his mind. "'We the People' samples a break from Black Sabbath in it," Innis gushes. "It's like the fist of God is smashing you in the face when you hear that groove over and over again."

Foster and Innis started crafting *Sacred Hearts Club* during the fall of 2014, near the end of the *Supermodel* support tour. They were eager to get back into the studio after a few rounds of road duty and ended up hunkering down at a friend's converted garage space in the Beachwood Canyon section of LA. At first, they kept the sessions casual intentionally, crafting beats and grooves without actually discussing their ultimate goals for the project, and then writing songs around those in-studio improvisations. About a year and a half into the process, Foster started combing through their recordings and decided which sonic experiments they wanted to finish.

"We didn't know what the aesthetic was gonna be," the frontman admits a few weeks later, after his band has finished whipping its live show into shape. "This hip-hop stuff threw a curveball when I heard the beats for 'Pay the Man' and 'Loyal Like Sid & Nancy.' Isom was working on those ideas by himself, and I was like, 'We have to work on this for Foster the People,' even though it was a completely different palette than what we'd done in the past. They became pillars for the record."

Neil Krug

Though the rest of the band came in and contributed their parts, Foster and Innis remained the album's core brain trust. "We've done remixes together for other artists," says Innis, who joined Foster the People as a touring musician in 2011 and has since grown into one of the band's primary creative forces and Foster's closest partner. "The first remix that we did was for Grouplove on a plane from LA to London. I was somewhere in between staying up on Ambien and a couple of glasses of red wine. From there, we started remixing a bit more, and then we started producing other artists so our writing relationship developed from there."

Near the start of this decade, Foster the People burst out of the gates with their infectious single "Pumped Up Kicks" and quickly established themselves at the head of the electro-influenced, hipster-approved indie-scene once navigated by MGMT and Passion Pit. Foster, who had a brief career as a jingle writer and began applying those techniques to his original material, has never been shy about marrying pop hooks and darker, lyrical imagery. When *Sacred Hearts Club* started veering from his loose blueprint, he followed his muse. "Music was genre-specific and very much in a box when I was a kid," he says. "Now, you put a playlist on and you're going from Kendrick [Lamar] to Aphex Twin to Mura Masa to The Growlers, and that played into how we decided what was gonna be on this record and how we sequenced it."

Eventually, Foster realized that he had written what was shaping up to be two very different LPs. One set of songs embraced this new frontier of hip-hop, electronica and dance, while the other nodded to his interests in more guitar-driven psychedelia. "Throughout the process, it was a huge question of what we should do," he admits. "Do we put out a record that is really seamless and has this identity that lives in a genre-specific world? We ultimately decided to pick the songs that would complement each other, but came from completely different worlds and sequenced the record like a roller-coaster."

Hip-hop has long emerged as a dominant force in pop music and, in recent years, those production elements have gradually started to shape the indie-rock aesthetic that inspired Foster the People. While the group aimed for a slightly more grassroots approach on *Supermodel*, at times utilizing instruments from around the globe, Foster considers the new LP an older, wiser sibling to the band's debut, *Torches*. "'Life on the Nickel' is based in hip-hop off a Cold Crush [Brothers] beat," he says of one of his early songs. "You can trace a line and see an evolution from that song to 'Doing It for the Money' and 'Loyal Like Sid & Nancy' [which are both on our new album]."

"Hip-hop is the bravest form of music right now, especially pop music—it's never apathetic, it's never complacent, it's always pushing boundaries and you can see a cultural shift in bands," Innis says. "It happened before in the late-'70s, early-'80s with Blondie, Talking Heads and these post-punk bands that were influenced by punk and disco. Hip-hop was going on in New York and had this exciting sound that was being made with drum machines. The grooves are rooted in soul, and soul is so important. It's so spiritual; it's so special. And hip-hop makes you wanna move. For a band, that's the holy grail if you can achieve it and be inspired."

After Foster the People figured out their new sound's blueprint, they brought in a variety of voices to help them fine-tune their vision, including OneRepublic singer Ryan Tedder, rappers Justus and K'naan and tastemaker/producer John Hill. However, Foster was careful to maintain the project's *band* feel. "We're still the same band we've been—obviously, minus Cubbie [Fink]," he says of the group's founding bassist, who left in 2015. "We've always taken this postmodern approach to music, weaving these things we grew up with together into something new."

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

ESCAPER BROOKLYN, N.Y

All the Colonel's Men

"Col. Bruce was someone who really believed in being himself," **Escaper** guitarist **Will Hanza** says while discussing the Ropeadope ethos that the group has absorbed since signing with the veteran, improv-friendly tastemakers. "And that's what makes you a good musician. If you're trying to be someone else, you're always going to be competing." Hanza and the rest of his Brooklyn-based post-rock, space-funk outfit are fresh off of the release of the John Davis-produced *Skeleton Key*, a conscious throwback to the classic thematic LPs of yore. "I know there aren't many conceptual albums out these days, but it really worked out. Escaper is escaping confinement and the *Skeleton Key* is a way to open up all the doors," he explains, also noting that the record touches on political themes ("Mutiny") and deeper life questions ("Lighthouse"). Along with their new originals, the outfit also recently found themselves on stages in New York City at tribute shows for two disparate influences, Radiohead and Phish. (The band covered "Airbag" and "Theme From the Bottom" respectively.) But, for Hanza, drummer **Andrew Nesbitt**, bassist **Jay Giacomazzo**, keyboardist **Adam Ahuja** and saxophonist **Johnny Butler**, the focus for now is on developing their new, young sound. "The idea of Escaper is to not be confined, even by the songs that we've written," Hanza explains. "Allow the jams to happen. You don't want to get lost in a meandering state, but let's just find a groove and go."

escapermusic.com ***Rob Slater***

PHOEBE BRIDGERS LOS ANGELES

A Stranger Among Us

Los Angeles singer-songwriter **Phoebe Bridgers** titled her first LP *Stranger in the Alps*. It's a striking, stoic image, but, like Bridgers herself, it's really not so serious. "That title is dark and witchy, but it's actually from the TV edit of *The Big Lebowski*. Walter is yelling, 'This is what happens when you fuck a stranger in the ass,'" she says. "And on cable, it's changed to 'When you find a stranger in the Alps.'" Duality is at the core of Bridgers' music: On first listen, the 11-track release is a hushed and haunting collection of hand-plucked, coffee-shop story-songs. But those stories are often bitingly funny. On aching opener "Smoke Signals," you can almost see her grinning through lyrics like, "All of our problems/ I'm gonna solve them/ with you riding shotgun, speeding 'cause fuck the cops." Bridgers' first break came in 2015 when a mutual friend introduced her to Ryan Adams at his studio. She played him one of her tunes on the spot and Adams' interest was immediately piqued, leading to the creation of her three-song 7" release, *Killer*. "I was so fucking nervous. I wish I could go back and tell myself to relax," she says. *Stranger in the Alps* has the wise narration of a career songwriter, with swelling melodies and echoing vocals that appear like ghosts. John Doe and Conor Oberst add vocals, and a Mark Kozelek cover closes the album. It's all gorgeous, but unavoidably somber. "People are surprised sometimes when they meet me. I try to overcompensate with my stage banter," she laughs, "so I talk in a weird Spicoli voice."

phoebefuckingbridgers.com

Justin Jacobs

Bryan Edward of Sobokeh (Escaper), Frank Ockenfels (Phoebe Bridgers)

KING CARDINAL DENVER

Mile-High Music

The songs **Brennan Mackey** wrote for *Great Lakes*, his band **King Cardinal**'s debut album, cover a range of musical and emotional territory. Brittle, brooding acoustic ballads like "Holy" rub up against the jazzy, heartbroken, R&B groove of "Better" before veering off to the ambient country of "Chicago," a banjo-driven lament drenched in forlorn harmonies. "I'm proud there's such a variety in the way we approach a song," Mackey says. "Everyone in the band has a wide range of influences, but everything feels cohesive. We've got songs that range from ethereal to full-on rock." Mackey put the band together in Denver after leaving a job he hated in Chicago. "The scene in Denver is very tight. Musicians come out and support each other, and there are radio stations and publications that give opportunities to local musicians that other cities don't offer," he says. Although he was initially looking for musicians to back him up on a singer-songwriter EP he was planning, the band's chemistry became obvious after a few rehearsals. "**Jamie Mitchell**, our original pedal-steel player—who is now our guitarist—asked his roommates to play with us. Everyone in his house became the band. They'd been playing music together for years, so it was easy for me to slip in and join them. We played together for the entire time I was writing *Great Lakes* and they all imprinted their personality onto the songs." *Great Lakes* was recorded live, in one week, at Sonic Ranch studio in Texas with producer and engineer Ted Young (Israel Nash, Kurt Vile, Banditos) lending a helping hand. "[Ted] helped move us into a live-sounding record," Mackey says. "Most of what you hear was done as a full-band take, with very few vocal or solo overdubs after the fact. That was something he championed and convinced us to do, which, in the end, really made for a better record." kingcardinal.com ***J. Poet***

MICHIGAN RATTLERS LOS ANGELES

Country Restraint

When once-and-future bandmates **Graham Young** and **Adam Reed** reunited in Los Angeles to form **Michigan Rattlers**, they shifted away from the electrified power of their youth toward countrified restraint. Both had bounced around high-school hard-rock combos in their native Northern Michigan, sharing a love for heavier hitters like AC/DC, but a post-college migration to the West Coast found the Midwestern duo embracing Americana storytelling. When their demo fell into the hands of Johnny K, the renowned LA producer recruited the duo to NRG Studios. A 12-hour session later, the Rattlers had a five-song, self-titled EP, and soon the attention of audiences and critics nationwide. Reed, an upright bassist, credits the harmonies and traditional instrumentation for attracting the "country" tag, but says there may be bigger and louder things to come. A full-length LP is mostly mapped out, with the Rattlers likely reconvening with Johnny K to record sometime in the late fall. Until then, the band will be back on the road. "It's a great feeling," says guitarist Young. "But, you've still got to keep your head down to write your best songs and play as well as you can every night." Adds Reed, "If anything, [the attention] makes us even more focused on making the next thing good."

michiganrattlers.com ***Larson Sutton***

Shelby Goldstein (Michigan Rattlers)

THE ACCIDENTALS

TRAVERSE CITY, MICH.

Folk Fusion

For multi-instrumentalists **Katie Larson** and **Sav Buist**, a teenage journey to a small music festival quickly became a creative flash point. "We saw Martin Sexton, and he was playing by himself at sunset on this little stage down in the woods," Larson reminisces. "It was then that we knew we wanted to get involved in the festival scene." Sitting in *Relix*'s New York office, the two high-school friends say their divergent upbringings fostered **The Accidentals**' unique fusion of indie-rock and Americana-pop. Whereas Larson, a skilled cellist, grew up in the orchestra, Buist was an 11-year-old fiddler, playing Nickel Creek songs with her family band. "We gave those things to each other," Buist points out. It didn't take long for the two friends to start sharing improvisational licks, writing songs and branching out to other instruments. With the addition of drummer **Michael Dause**, the trio's first major-label release *Odyssey* is a folk-fusion pastiche, with equal parts fury and finesse. "Despite our band name, [the album has] come out really intentionally, and is authentic to everything we believe in, which is being genuine, real and ragged-but-right," Buist notes. Toss in guest spots by Jenny Conlee (The Decemberists), Carter Gravatt (Carbon Leaf), Dominic Davis (Jack White) and friend/sometimes-tourmate Keller Williams and *Odyssey* acts as The Accidentals' coming out party. As Buist says, it was a labor of love well worth the effort: "That's our goal in the end, to be able to do a lot of different things, work with a lot of different people and gain a lot of experience from it."

theaccidentalsmusic.com ***Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta***

GROUP AT WORK

MISTER HEAVENLY

Sandpaper and Honey

IT ALL STARTED IN THE basement of a building in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Three friends—although two of them didn't know each other at the time—came together to simply make some music and see what happened.

"It was so strange. It was just a basement—it wasn't like, 'This is our rehearsal space,'" says Ryan Kattner—also known as Honus Honus from the band Man Man—of the trio's original practice venue, which they were borrowing from a friend of a friend. "We had the key to the building but knew no one in it. For all intents and purposes, we were breaking and entering into this basement."

That was back in 2010, when Kattner started jamming with Nick Thorburn of Islands and The Unicorns and drummer Joe Plummer, who currently plays with Cold War Kids and whose résumé also includes stints with Modest Mouse and The Shins.

Though other projects occupied most of their time, the indie-supergroup trio, now known as Mister Heavenly, released their debut album in 2011. And, six years later, they've returned with this fall's refreshingly delightful offering, *Boxing the Moonlight*.

Originally self-described by the tongue-in-cheek genre "doom-wop"—the band has since left that in the rearview mirror—the music of Mister Heavenly draws from each of its members' unique sensibilities to form engaging, earworm indie-pop, punctuated by the disparate yet somehow perfectly paired voices of Kattner and Thorburn.

"I like it much better than the first one," Kattner says of the new album. "Just the way this record was written allowed Nick and I to have more interplay with each other. I enjoy the songs where our voices are constantly back and forth—singing the same story but with different perspectives, or just singing to each other. It's just far more interesting to me."

"Sandpaper and honey," Thorburn interjects, referring to the pairing of Kattner's signature gravelly timbre and his own cleaner sound. "I think it does something to your brain when you're listening. You get a little bit of this thing that you wanted, and you get a little bit of that thing that you wanted. Hopefully, at least—that's the idea."

Matt Inman

GROUP AT WORK

SPAFFORD

Desert Dwellers

FOR YEARS, BRIAN Moss and Jordan Fairless tried to form a jamband in the remote city of Prescott, Ariz. When they finally struck gold with Spafford, the humble music scene of the American Southwest became less of a hindrance and more of a sonic incubator. In a flash, their high-energy improvisations attracted a loyal fanbase.

"They needed something to latch on to," Moss says regarding the regional transplants from the jam-centric Northeast and West Coast that comprised their earlier audience. "Spafford really filled that void for people [in Arizona]." The band's popularity grew by word-of-mouth and they set off on long drives to play shows and heighten their exposure. "We would wrap towels in ice and hang them around our necks as we were driving to California in 120 degrees in the desert with no A/C," Moss laughs.

The band gained another leg up when they started playing late-night after-parties for heavy hitters like Widespread Panic and Furthur. Now, Spafford is one of the jam scene's hottest prospects, touring with Umphrey's McGee last winter, rocking festival stages coast to coast and laying down exciting, intricate performances that spawn impassioned analyses by fans. Recently, drummer Cameron Laforest joined their roster, finalizing a lineup that also includes Moss (vocals/guitar), Fairless (vocals/bass) and Andrew "Red" Johnson on keys. "Cameron is an extraordinary player with a lot of insight and a lot of natural ability," Moss notes. "We've only just begun what this new lineup is capable of."

According to Moss, Spafford documents everything they play, including rehearsals and performances. That archival ethos generated their latest release, the hour-long, *Abaculus: An Improvisational Experience*. Recorded at the band's rehearsal space, dubbed "The Pound" (because of the nearby hordes of feral cats in downtown, industrial Phoenix), *Abaculus* is a mini-study in the spontaneous, jam-oriented mission of Spafford writ large. "We decided to kick out a jam, and just have fun with it," Moss explains. "There was no planning, no more direction than what you listen to. We weren't calling things out. We didn't say anything to each other. We just jammed. And, for me, that's the most beautiful music in the world—just creating music out of thin air."

Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

Dan Monick (Mister Heavenly)

SO FAR, SO GOOD

The Kooks may have released their first compilation record but, for this English quartet, the best is yet to come.

By **HUGH HARRIS**

WHAT makes a great greatest hits album? What makes a deep sea *deep*? What makes a pair of shoes a *pair*? Joking aside, it is quite a difficult question.

Compile yourself! What are your greatest hits? Gather your greatest achievements and present them in one uber-concentrated mega-record. What does it signify? For many, it draws light to a conclusive end; it even spells it. This is only natural. Before we pass on to the next world, we see a flash of life events—our greatest hits—that are thrust from our memorandum. It's a survival technique designed to rile us and give us one last push at fighting for life. For many artists, this is the feeling they have when a label suggests a greatest-hits record, as morbid as it seems! Is it just the final flogging of a dead horse? Not always; it can be a joyous celebration of that horse's life.

But for us, The Kooks, it's the knighting and remounting of that horse.

So, you may ask, what constitutes the perfect greatest hits record? The band—a hits album is an opportunity rarely afforded to many groups. And the bands that can hold their heads high with pride for over a decade's worth of work are the bands that aren't suffering from dysfunction anymore and have gained an advanced perspective on their achievements. We were propelled into our success very early—perhaps at a time when we were not equipped to be there. And for a while, we have been playing catchup.

As little as a few years ago, it would have been a different story, but I can say now that I feel proud to be part of this for two reasons:

1. Most albums are already greatest hits compilations at the time they are recorded, just with a smaller catchment of songs. So, to even have it suggested that your work is agreeable over a number of years is a huge compliment to a band!

2. Many artists are doing away with the album altogether. This is catastrophic for creativity and quite exhausting for any writer—people employ teams of writers to combat this, like kleptomaniacs scouring through the history of music and, sometimes, getting done for it. People make playlists from these songs. That is how we listen to music now. Our patience has depleted as an audience, sadly, due to the amount of choices we have. Music has become an overwhelming scrolling operation; as the wealth of Netflix-like options meets MTV-like attention spans, the product line becomes toe-deep and homogenized. Bands that are so easily picked up and loved and rated are just as easily discarded and, largely, this disposable market benefits industry over audience.

But a greatest-hits collection is not hiding from this model! And once that is embraced, then it becomes an absolute joy for a touring band to play. We've been having some of our most connective, loving crowds ever on this "Best Of" tour. I now only hope we make it to another one.

Concluding, the "greatest thing" about a greatest-hits album is the band. If you get to make one as a band, then, basically, it's great. But it should not be a full stop in your career. Instead a comma, or an ellipsis—a throw to the future. So far, so good.

Hugh Harris is The Kooks' lead guitarist. The British pop-rock group, which formed in 2004, recently released a greatest hits album, The Best of... So Far, *featuring material from their first four records as well as a pair of new originals.*

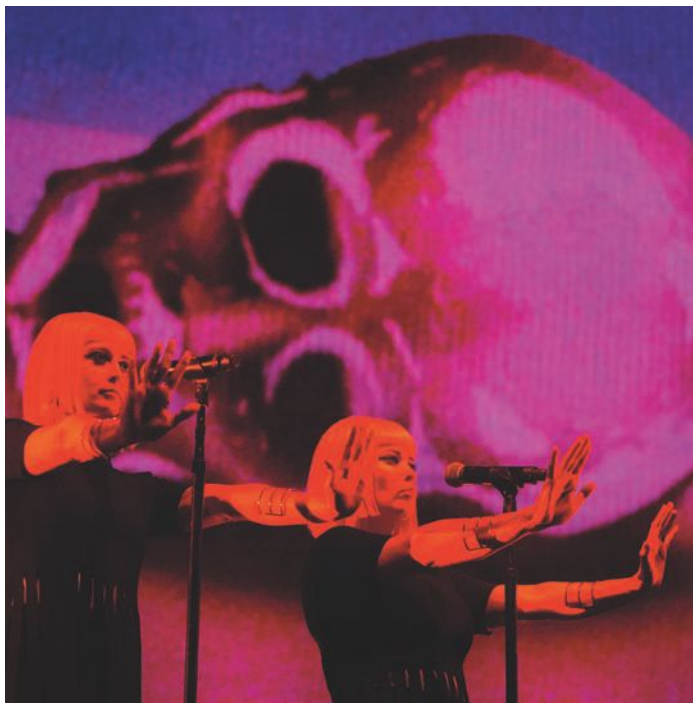
"US + THEM"

Lucius' Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig offer an intimate look at Roger Waters' latest international spectacle.

IN 2015, ROGER WATERS was in the process of putting together a special band for his headlining appearance at Rhode Island's iconic Newport Folk. He'd already recruited the members of My Morning Jacket, who he'd recently played with at a Levon Helm tribute, and veteran guitarist G.E. Smith, but the Pink Floyd bassist and songwriter was looking to embellish things a bit with some extra voices. Newport producer Jay Sweet suggested festival favorites Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig, who are best known as the twin-clothing-clad singers from Lucius, and Waters walked away with two new members of his touring ensemble.

The Lucius frontwomen played a few dates with Waters in 2016—including his spots at the classic-rock summit Desert Trip, where they helped lower the average performer age by a few decades—and are now part of his "Us + Them" arena tour, which kicked off in May. (The singers also contributed to Waters' first rock album in almost a quarter-century, 2017's *Is This the Life We Really Want?*)

Wolfe and Laessig aren't the only familiar faces helping the politically charged and often controversial Waters through his mix of Pink Floyd favorites and originals: His current band also includes guitarist and "resident hippie" Jonathan Wilson, Atoms for Peace drummer Joey Waronker and My Morning Jacket keyboardist Bo Koster, who was called in as a last-minute sub. Here, Lucius offers a rare peek behind the walls of Waters' large-scale trek.



It's absolutely wild to look out at a sold-out arena from the stage every night and see the sea of fans. It is a true thrill to sing these songs for people who care so much about this music.

We've been bleaching our hair for about five years and, well, our hair was completely dead. It's funny because, for that entire time, we would often either get asked, or people would assume, we were wearing wigs. We were so proud about having this real hair symmetry, but it cost us! So, we finally took a hint from those writers and fans and bought some fancy wigs! Now, we're allowing for our natural hair to grow in a healthy way instead of spending hours dealing with it.

The band has a ritual before every show: We huddle just before going onstage. We feel such love for this incredible collection of musicians: Gus Seyffert, Jon Carin, Joey Waronker, Jonathan Wilson, Ian Ritchie, Dave Kilminster, Bo Koster, Drew Erickson and, of course, Roger Waters.

We spend our show prep time looking at drag queens for makeup inspiration! No one knows stage makeup better than the queens! (Shout out to Jinkx Monsoon, Sharon Needles, Detox and Kimberly Clark!)

Roger has been so receptive, encouraging us to bring our own imprint to his music. With "Great Gig in the Sky," as it is such a well-known recording, you want to honor the timelessness that is Clare Torry but, in our case, there's two of us. It was necessary to bring our own light and life to it, which has been, thankfully, well-received. We look forward to that moment every night!

Katelzor

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW IS...

LOCKN'

#charlottesville

VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS

THE BARR BROTHERS

Queens of the Breakers BY DEAN BUDNICK

"ON ALL THE OTHER records, I'd pretty much written all the songs by myself, either in a bedroom or down in the studio. But, this time, we decided to try something different," Brad Barr muses while tracing the creation of *Queens of the Breakers*, the third full-length record from The Barr Brothers. The Montreal-based singer/guitarist explains that—along with his drumming sibling Andrew and harpist Sarah Page—on this album, they "decided to go off and see how we play together. It had been over seven years, and we decided to check back in with the three of us to see how we'd play together without any songs, to see if we can develop the music out of that. In the past, Andrew and Sarah and whoever else was in the band would tailor their approach to what the song called for, crafting their parts around a song that I wrote with a lot of room to be as impressionistic as they wanted to be. But this time, we wanted to develop the music out of that kind of playing instead of the inverse."

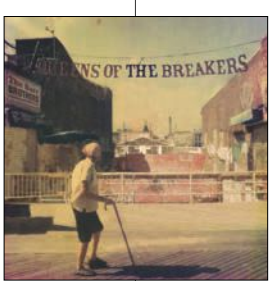
DEFIBRILLATION (FEAT. LUCIUS)

This was the last song to be conceived, written and recorded for the album. Andrew's opening drum beat was the impetus for the tune. Our mother had a small, not-really-consequential fall, but she needed stitches in her head. He went to the emergency room with her at 1 a.m., and overheard two EKG machines pulsing. They were lining up and then going out of sync, and then lining up. I assume that they were monitoring two patients on the wing.

When we got back to Montreal, he was like, "I'm gonna try and make a beat based off of that." He emailed that beat to me—we'd already started mixing the record—and I pinned the song on top of it really quickly. Then, we got the Lucius girls to sing the bridge and they just sent the song to the next level. It was the last tune to come to us and probably the one we spent the least amount of time laboring over.

LOOK BEFORE IT CHANGES

I wrote this one while I was working on a six-string ukulele that I brought with me to Mexico in the winter of 2015. Then, it all came together during our first session for the record. We went to this cabin in the woods of Northern Quebec and we were doing these improvisations and just trying things out. When we took a break, I tracked that little song just as is. For the first take, I sang and played the ukulele. The next time we took a break, Andrew went in and did a drum pass on it—pretty much just cymbals. And then, during the next break, we recorded Sarah.



We felt that we should just build this little song off on the side while we were writing the songs that were gonna be on our record. And it ended up being an easy and delightful experience. It feels really good and it reminds me of Lhasa de Sela, one of our friends from Montreal. She was an icon up here. Her voice was something just totally otherworldly and influential on all of us. Her band was The Barr Brothers band, minus me. She had Andrew on drums, Sarah on harp, our first bass player Miles [Perkin] and Joe Grass, who plays pedal steel with us. And then she got cancer in 2009, and she passed away on New Year's Day 2010.

SONG THAT I HEARD

I started the song on the same beach in Mexico at the same time as "Look Before It Changes." I knew it was exactly the kind of song I wanted to deliver, but it took me a while. I tried to shake that lyric "song that I heard" for a long time. I thought it was kind of corny: "Already changed by the song that I heard/ already claimed by the song that I heard." I felt a little embarrassed by that lyric and finally I just gave over to it and started riffing around it. Once I accepted that one line, the rest of the song came into place.

I reference the Great Antonio, who was a strongman back in the '40s–'60s when you had these strongmen at carnivals. He dragged four city buses filled with people and also a train. He ended up living in Montreal on the streets [after growing up in Yugoslavia]—he had huge dreadlocks. He had this sign, which said: "I will pick up your family for money!" He's an icon here and an early symbol of the city, but he is relatively unknown outside of here.

MAYBE SOMEDAY

This is the only cover on the record. It's a Nathan Moore song that was recorded by Surprise Me Mr. Davis. [The group features Moore, the Barrs, their Slip bandmate Marc Friedman and Marco Benevento.] We improvised on it at the cabin. Sarah came up with the guitar riffs—that's her on guitar.

It's the only recording I've ever made or released where I'm not playing guitar. Andrew championed that. It reminded us of funk music from the '70s. It's a really innocent, naïve spin on what's funky with Sarah riffing on the guitar. Funk is not really in her musical vocabulary, but she came up with this oblong, crazy little riff that Andrew pushed forward. Then, we tried putting "Maybe Someday" on top of that, and it worked. It's fun for me to sing it, trying to invoke Hugh Mundell, who's an early ska, rocksteady singer—a Studio One guy—and a little bit of Elvis Costello.

KOMPROMAT

That one came out of a really true improv with Andrew at the cabin in Northern Quebec. It was just us jamming together, feeling really loose, feeling really free and having that sort of main riff come out. Andrew discovered the word "kompromat." [The word refers to compromising material used to injure the reputation of a public figure—the term gained notoriety in reference to the dossier that purported to chronicle Donald Trump's transgressions in Russia.]

The song had been taking a more political/social critique format that Dylan called a "finger-pointing song." For me, that was what the song seemed to call for lyrically and, when Andrew heard my first verses, he said, "Do you think you could find some way to fit in kompromat?" I said, "I don't think I can fit

"It had been over seven years, and we decided to check back in with the three of us to see how we'd play together without any songs, to see if we can develop the music out of that," Brad Barr says of the collaborative sessions for The Barr Brothers' third LP.

the word kompromat in there but I can just name the song 'Kompromat.'" So that's what we did. I've made some pretty feeble, awful stabs at writing more social commentary-type songs in the past. This is the first one where I at least did it in a more graceful way that I could live with in the future.

YOU WOULD HAVE TO LOSE YOUR MIND

I came up with the chord pattern, rhythmic pattern and melody [for this song] during the end of the *Sleeping Operator* sessions. I thought about putting it on *Sleeping Operator* at the time, but I was spent lyrically—or I just couldn't figure out what I wanted to sing about. So one of the first things we did when we started improvising for this record was say, "Let's check out this thing; let's see what it feels like."

The version that's on the record was directly from the cabin. We tried to recreate it in another studio here in Montreal and weren't really successful, in our minds, at beating whatever we got out in the woods. Something about the openness of the room, the feeling of having the water right next to us—the cabin was very remote, about 30 minutes from the nearest market and right next to a lake. So the consistency of water just sort of seemed to permeate those recordings, and that's what I feel when I listen to the song.

QUEENS OF THE BREAKERS

We had a breakthrough with this: We recorded an acoustic version in the cabin and then, once we got a take we liked, we went in and overdubbed a full electric band on top of the acoustic band. It just knocked us out. We were really excited with what happened, and it became our guiding song. We felt that way for about a month and then we started second-guessing it, thinking, "Maybe this doesn't sound like us. Maybe it's somebody else's song. Maybe it sounds too much like this other band. It doesn't feel like The Barr Brothers."

We tried it almost a dozen different times in several different studios over a year. One of the sessions has 60 drum patterns—we just muted the drums to let Andrew try different patterns. In the end, we said, "Let's just use the original one. It has something that made us really happy. And to hell with it—let's just ride that feeling."

I still feel great about it, but it has been one of the trickiest tunes for us to own. Maybe that's because it's one of the more straightforward rock-and-roll songs that we've ever tried to record. There's no big left turns in it, there's nothing idiosyncratic or eccentric about it, but it was very refreshing to play and it sounded easy and fun.

Lyrically, "Queens of the Breakers" is a reference to my old gang of friends—those early teenage friends who, at 13, 14, 15, you first smoked weed with and went to your first Grateful Dead shows with and started really getting into music with on a more cerebral level. We used to do weird shit like dressing up in my friend's mother's clothing, which were loud, colorful dresses. We'd raid her closet, put her dresses on, and sort of maraud in Providence—like go to restaurants and just sit down. I remember, one time, we went to The Breakers Mansion in Newport, R.I., dressed in his mother's clothing, and took a tour of the place. I was thinking about those guys and those times, and I dubbed us Queens of the Breakers almost 30 years later.

IT CAME TO ME

This one began as an afterthought. Sarah had gone to bed, and Andrew and I were playing really loud at the end of the day. It was probably 2 or 3 a.m., and we just started rocking out. The lyrics came quickly, which is what I always look for when coming up with stuff. The best possible scenario for me is that a lyric hits at the same time as the music, and that gives me something I can work with. Otherwise, if I just have the music, I'm fishing for a long time.

It all came easily, but I never thought it would be one that The Barr Brothers would use. I couldn't imagine how Sarah was gonna treat that one. It felt a little bit too abrasive for what I assumed she would be willing to put up with, volume-wise. But she jumped all over it. She really dove in.

That's another thing I want to say about this record—Sarah took a huge leap forward from *Sleeping Operator*. There's some ambient stuff you hear that almost sounds

Continued on page 76

EYES OF THE WORLD
GRATEFUL DEAD PHOTOGRAPHY 1965-1995

BY **JOSH BARON**

MAY 1966
San Francisco
PHOTOGRAPH
© HERB GREENE

"This was back when it was fun," Greene fondly reminisces about this iconic Dead image. "We were kids. There was no hassle of assistants or contracts to do a photo shoot." For this portrait, Greene photographed the band as they walked the streets of Haight-Ashbury. "They gave you great opportunities; you just had to see them," he says. "They really loved me and I never crossed them. I also always knew when to shut up and leave."

Cover image by Jim Marshall /
© Jim Marshall Photography LLC

I CAN'T PINPOINT the exact moment the idea for *Eyes of the World* came to me, but it was unequivocally born out of my time as editor of *Relix*. I recall thinking, "How can it be that there's no big coffee table book of all the iconic Grateful Dead images?"

There were stellar single photographer collections and essential books that had photos and text, like *Playing in the Band* and *Grateful Dead Family Album*. Yet, there was no all-encompassing, image-driven book that put the emphasis entirely on the shots.

After calls with several major publishers, it became clear that, while there was plenty of interest, the only way that this book was going to happen was if I self-published. Two conversations later, Jay Blakesberg—a longtime friend, *Relix* contributor and legendary Dead photographer—agreed to partner with me to put it out through his Rock Out Books imprint.

I cast as wide a net as possible in searching for images. I reached out to more than a hundred photographers to request images for review. Once everything was in, Jay and I began the editing process of selecting the best submissions, while making sure that every year of the band's 30-year run from 1965 to 1995 was covered. We ended up collecting 220 images by 61 photographers that we believe will stand the test of time as the definitive visual document of the Grateful Dead.

JUNE 16, 1974

Iowa State Fairgrounds DES MOINES, IOWA

PHOTOGRAPH © JAMES LEE KATZ

"I was 20 years old at the time," recalls Katz of this image. "I had gotten a camera as a present the previous year and had started taking it to shows. I was never a professional photographer, but I'm glad I took pictures at the show because now I have these wonderful memories to look back on that I can share with other fans." He still sends a group text every June 16 to the friends who attended the show with him.

SEPTEMBER 28, 1975

Lindley Meadow, Golden Gate Park

SAN FRANCISCO

PHOTOGRAPH © ALVAN MEYEROWITZ

In pouring through every available resource for possible images, we came across Alvan's name associated with some shots we'd found online. It was nearly impossible to find anything about Alvan, save for a three-minute documentary that filmmaker Doug Walker had made in 2016. In it, Alvan, a somewhat hermetic old man living in a rundown apartment, is revealed to be one of Bill Graham's house photographers from the '70s. Walker helped facilitate getting us some of Alvan's images, including this one of the elusive Owsley Stanley III with Phil Lesh. Lesh was thrilled to see this "unknown" image of him and his old pal.

MARCH 20, 1977

Winterland Arena

SAN FRANCISCO

PHOTOGRAPH © ED PERLSTEIN

"Winterland was an old rectangular ice rink with a balcony that circumnavigated the arena," recalls Perlstein. "Once I discovered the part of the balcony that hung over the rear of the stage, it opened up a whole new world of photographic possibilities.

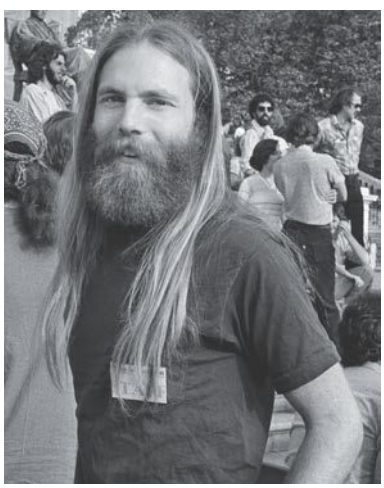
It allowed me the freedom of shooting directly behind and above the band. It was just a matter of waiting for Jerry, Bob or Phil to turn around at the right moment and interact with the drummers. It's a point of view rarely seen in music photography."

MAY 7, 1977

Boston Garden BOSTON

PHOTOGRAPH © PETER SIMON

Rolling Stone hired Simon to photograph the band for a cover story they were planning to do. "Given that the band hated having their pictures taken, Garcia liked my unobtrusive, fly-on-the-wall style," he recounts. "The magazine wanted a group portrait that I knew the band would hate doing. Nonetheless, after soundcheck, everyone piled into this tiny backstage dressing room, sat on a couch and we quickly realized there was nowhere for Donna to sit. I suggested—calling upon my vast experience as a family portrait photographer—that she try lying across everyone. Garcia's gesture in the picture is him saying, 'For you, Peter, I guess we'll do anything.'"



MAY 6, 1979

Washington, D.C.

PHOTOGRAPH © JAY BLAKESBERG

"I was a month out from graduating from high school and went to Virginia and Maryland to see two Dead shows," recalls Blakesberg. "After the Baltimore show, there was a giant 'No Nukes' rally on the front steps of the Capitol. I found a press pass on the ground, went backstage and ran into Weir and Brent Mydland. Brent had only played a few shows with the band at that point. This was my *Almost Famous* moment as it was my first encounter with a band member offstage. *Relix* published this photo shortly after I took it, and it was perhaps the first time Deadheads got to see what the new keyboard player looked like."

JUNE 1987

Club Front SAN RAFAEL, CALIF.

PHOTOGRAPH © MICHAEL O'NEILL

Out of all the undiscovered treasures we found, O'Neill's shots were some of our favorites. This is an outtake from a *Rolling Stone* cover story he did. He was gracious (and trusting enough) to hand over nearly 40 proof sheets from this session that included portraits of all the bands members and many of their families. His photos, particularly of Mydland and Garcia, gave us chills.

To read more about the project and check out sample pages, visit ***eyesoftheworldbook.com.***

JACK JOHNSON

Shining a *Light* on current issues and family matters. By **DEAN BUDNICK**

Morgan Maassen

"I THINK LIFE SPEEDS up a little bit," Jack Johnson muses, as he considers the four-year lag between the release of his last studio record, *From Here to Now to You* and his new album, *All the Light Above It Too.* The gap is the longest of his career, dating back to his 2001 debut, *Brushfire Fairytales*. "I have three kids, which speeds life up for you. And then, if you think about when you're one year old, one year is basically 100 percent of your life. Then, when you're two years old, one year is 50 percent of your life, and so on. And it's this exponential graph where, once you're 42 like I am, one year is just a fraction of your life, so the years pass quicker. But it's good to focus on that and not let it get away from you."

Johnson recorded *All the Light Above It Too* at his own Mango Tree Studio in Hawaii. He produced it with Robbie Lackritz (Feist, Bahamas), and while his steady bandmates—drummer Adam Topol, bassist Merlo Podlewski and keyboard player Zach Gill—appear on a few of the tracks, Johnson handled most of the instrumental duties himself. "The main idea is that as soon as you learn how to play a song, there's that moment when you know all the chords and lyrics and you don't have to read them, and it feels really magical. Then, it only takes a few more times of having to play that song all the way through, and you feel like you're reciting, rather than doing a magic trick," he explains. "So I just wanted to have a friend in the room that could push 'record' with a good microphone while the song still felt like magic."

As you began working on material over the past few years, was there any particular moment where you decided that enough was enough and it was time to go back into the studio and record?

I'm always writing, always putting little ideas down. It's really easy for me to get one line for a song, or get a hook that feels like a great song. And then I put it away and forget about it. Sometimes it just takes some help from my wife, who's always been my editor—ever since we first met when we were 18 and I was trying to write my first songs. She always participated without even realizing it. Sometimes I'd be playing music, even when she was in the corner of the other room grading papers when she was a teacher, and if something caught her attention, then I'd know it was worth keeping. If I couldn't catch her attention, then I'd just move on.

Every once in a while, she would see what a scatterbrain I was, and would say, "OK, I see that this song and this song are two different songs but about the same thing. You could really combine those two and you'd be done with that one because this one would be the chorus, and that's your verse." And she would help me connect all these dots. We'd get out some paper, make a list of all the ideas I had and gather the different recordings. I don't even know what that job is called, but she was like a curator. [*Laughs*.] Every couple of years, she'll realize I've had enough experiences, and we'll piece it all together and put it out as a record.

When it comes to writing songs, do you compel yourself to sit down and work, or do you wait for a bolt of inspiration?

A little bit of each. The way my brain works is mostly in rhymes—it's how I remember things. If someone gives me their phone number or if I'm trying to remember someone's name, I'll usually put it to something that rhymes in my head. And after everyone's asleep, I'll get my guitar out, and if there's one line that's been in my head all day, I'll put it to a melody and see whether it sparks something. And then there is the question in my mind of, "Why is that relevant to what's going on in the world? How is that a metaphor for something else I've been reading about or seen?" I'll start working on it a bit and, a lot of times, one verse or one chorus will come really quickly.

If I don't have the time, then I'll put it aside, knowing that it can become a song. Actually

finishing what I started is when the work comes in. Anyone can have a good idea, a thesis for a paper. I was always the guy doing the all-nighters the day before my paper was due. It's the same now. Once I know I have the real ideas, and I have 10 or so of them, I can get in the studio, but I almost need that deadline to actually write the third verse. A lot of times, I just need that kick in the butt to actually finish the thing. The songs need to be sparked from an inspired place—something needs to happen where they pop into my mind.

When I recently spoke with Zach Gill, he mentioned that you connected when he first met you back at University of California, Santa Barbara, because you were the only other person he knew who was serious about writing original songs. Do you have a similar recollection?

I had the exact same feeling. Isla Vista was a beautiful place to be at 18-22 years old. There were so many garages in that town that were set up with drums, bass and keyboard, and I knew a bunch of different spots where you could just ride by to see if a great jam was happening. It was so fun.

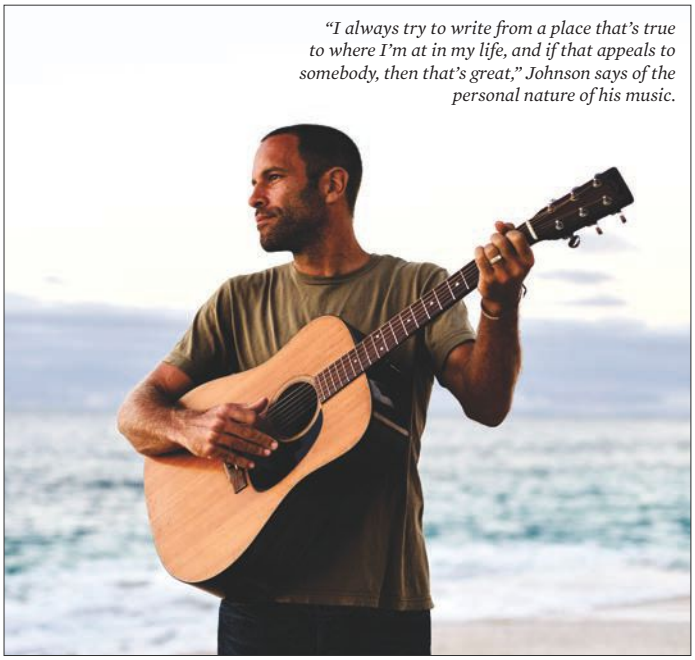
We met during freshman year, but it wasn't until junior or senior year that we started hanging out, just the two of us, doing the four-track stuff all night. It'd be more about showing each other lyrics and creating these smaller spaces where our lyrics had room to breathe. For me, it was a guitar and a voice, and for him, it was either a Wurly or a piano and a voice, and then just some light embellishment—different sounds to support it.

Besides my [now] wife, he was the first person I felt like I could hang out with and share my lyrics. Zach seemed to be trying to do the same thing I was, and I respected his mind and the way it worked. And I still do. That was a strong bonding experience.

Jumping back prior to that moment, do you remember the first song that you ever wrote?

There are two or three that I can remember from high school, when we had a punk band called Limber Chickens. We would do mostly Minor Threat covers, but we had some Descendents, Bad Religion, Fugazi, Ramones and Dead Kennedys mixed in there. We wrote one called "Apathy," and it was the bass player who did most of the singing. I remember all of us being in the garage that day, chiming in and trying to find words that rhymed. He was a little ahead of us in terms of wanting to do originals. And so we went along with him. But once we finished it and played it, I remember thinking, "This is just as good as those songs we're covering."

I love seeing something come from nothing, starting with just the title and an idea, and then having a complete thing. I love that feeling of producing something, whether it's a film or a song or an album. And then I remember trying to write a couple songs of my own; they were more like exercises in rhyming. I remember thinking that the particular song didn't mean much to me—I was sort of held back by the idea of having to find things that rhymed. So that was the beginning of it, in high school. But it wasn't until the first year of college that I really started writing songs. I look back now and I laugh at a few of them, but at the same time, I believed in them then. I was still in college when I started to work on half of that first batch of songs, including "Flake" and "Posters," which were on my first album. For some of them, I changed the lyrical content, but the melodies were mostly from my senior year. That's where the songwriting process started for me.



"I always try to write from a place that's true to where I'm at in my life, and if that appeals to somebody, then that's great," Johnson says of the personal nature of his music.

Before I heard *Brushfire Fairytales* in 2001, I knew your background as a surfer, and I assumed it would sound like Minor Threat. Then when it didn't, I decided that maybe the music reflected your perspective in keeping your cool inside the eye of a storm. Do you think that's accurate in some way?

Absolutely, 100 percent. I wake up every morning curious about what the swell direction is. The ocean is where I want to be every day; surfing is what I love to do. And with that, there are so many decisions you have to make that are happening really quick, and it slows time down a little bit when you have to ride a wave.

That's something my bass player pointed out to me. Sometimes when you're out there and the sound sucks at a club, or you get a horrible review, those things could really slow you down if you take them on too much. It's just learning how to change directions and steer out of it and improvise a little bit. We always think of improvising in terms of music, but it's also with your path in life, being able to readjust, move around things, keep flowing and let it all brush off of you. You always get to kick out when you're surfing, and you always get another chance to go out and catch another wave. And so I can see the analogy to that for sure, with my choices in music and how we've gotten there.

The *All the Light* song "Fragments" originally appeared in the documentary *The Smog of the Sea*, in which you joined scientist Marcus Eriksen to examine plastic pollution in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. How did you come to be involved with the film?

Right now, I'm on the north-facing side of the island I live on. It's a place where a lot of tourists visit and you see a lot of pictures of the clean, white sandy beaches. After storms, we'll get some debris, and plastic will wash in but, day-to-day, you really don't see it along the high-tide line. But if you just go 15-20 minutes from where I live to the east side of the island, there are a few beaches where it really happens. It's something about the exact direction that they're facing, like a filtering system in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and it is just out of control. You can't believe how high the high-tide line fills up with plastic. All these little pieces of things we see from our own lives, like forks, toothbrushes, lighters and bottle caps—some broken down with bites taken out of them, others in perfect form.

Some might have come from this island, but the majority, you can tell, have been in the

Continued on page 78

Morgan Maassen

Hops lined up in the tasting room

Testing the hops fresh out of the kiln to ensure they've been properly dried (note the swanky footwear)

Zak Schroerlucke shows off a fresh Amarillo hop

Beau Evers points out that when the bales of hops are stored away, the air temperature is recorded

HOP MAKING SENSE

Relix has teamed up with Kyle Hollingsworth and SweetWater Brewing Company for a different type of jam session, which will yield a new collaborative beer By **DEAN BUDNICK**

AS KYLE HOLLINGSWORTH AND I took our seats at a table covered with newly picked hops and equally fresh beer, our journey was finally underway. It had taken us three and a half years to arrive at this point, which is why we were savoring the moment—and, of course, the beer. Did I mention the beer?

In February of 2014, I traveled to the Hard Rock Hotel in Riviera Maya, Mexico to cover The String Cheese Incident's destination event while writing a *Relix* story on SCI's first new studio album in nearly nine years, *A Song in My Head*.

During a break in the band's mid-afternoon rehearsals before their first performance, Kyle and I shared some quality wort talk. We were both homebrewers, although Kyle had long since stepped up his game and left his five-gallon kettle behind to pitch yeast in the big leagues. He had not only proven himself to be an adept musical collaborator, but also an adroit brewing partner, working with Boulder Beer, Stone, Cigar City and many others to release nationally distributed seasonal ales.

I had never done anything like that but I did have one brief, shining moment in the sun. (Perhaps that's a poor metaphor because homebrewers are quick to decry the deleterious impact of direct sunlight.) Back in the mid-'90s, I devoted most of my summer brewing efforts to wheat beer, which seemed to be the ideal option for warmer weather. This was long before hefeweizens were quite so popular and easy to procure—now, of course, with minimal effort, you can locate a Belgian witbier and perhaps even a dunkelweizen or a weizenbock.

By the time of Phish's Great Went in August 1997, I had refined my recipe to the point where I was moderately proud of it and ready to share. I bought a new 10-gallon kettle so that I could "mass produce" it in time for the festival. The results were actually quite decent and are even memorialized in print—if you dig out the very first edition of *The Phish Companion: A Guide to the Band and Their Music* (2000), you can see a photo on page 650, in which Mockingbird Foundation founding board member Jack Lebowitz is holding up my Great Went Wheat. (There's no fancy graphic art on the label, just my cramped handwriting, which I like to think inspired the minimalist design aesthetic of the illustrious Maine Beer Company—which, maybe not so coincidentally, is located in the same state as the Phish fest.)

So there are my beer bona fides, such as they are, in all of their 10-gallon glory. By contrast, when Kyle was working on Boulder Beer's Hoopla Pale Ale, Stone's Collective Distortion IPA (with Alice Cooper guitarist Keri Kelli) or Cigar City's Happening Now Session IPA, they were using fermentation tanks on another scale, brewing by the barrel not the gallon. (There are 31 gallons to a barrel and by way of comparison, one of my favorite local craft brewers, Westerly, R.I.'s Grey Sail, led by "yeast wrangler" Josh Letourneau, utilizes tanks that range in size from 20 to 120 barrels.)

I was fascinated by the process through which Kyle and company created a beer on such a scope, from ingredient selection to pilot brewing and final production. I wondered what it would it be like to participate in such an endeavor and eventually came to the realization that there are plenty of *Relix* readers who would similarly want to share in the experience or, at the very least, get some eyeballs on the action (and of course, some taste buds as well).

So, Kyle and I decided that we would try to find a brewing partner for a three-way collab. Our goal was to chronicle the various stages and then encourage everyone to seek out our exceptionally tasty creation at their local grocery store or "paaackie" (as my native New Englanders say).

The two of us were good to go, all we needed was to identify said brewing partner (which was easier said than done). We continued to toss ideas back and forth until Kyle finally nailed it: SweetWater.

While I've only had a few opportunities up in the Northeast to sample the offerings from the Atlanta-based brewery (although they continue to expand their flavorful reach), I knew plenty of folks who are fans of their work, which includes 420 Extra Pale Ale, Goin' Coastal IPA and various seasonals and limited brews like the recent Torikumi, which is a wasabi-infused blonde ale.

SweetWater opened in 1997, and the fact that they proudly trumpeted their "20 years of Heady Beers" certainly marked them as a fine fit to me. What's more, they clearly had an appreciation for the musical side of things, as evidenced by their annual SweetWater 420 Fest. The 2017 installment at Centennial Olympic Park featured music by Widespread Panic, Trey Anastasio Band, Ween, moe., and dozens of other acts on multiple stages, as well as an official after-party at Terminal West, headlined by none other than the Kyle Hollingsworth Band.

It's safe to say, Kyle had the proper contact info.

So we set up a call with head brewer Nick Nock and "Minister of Propaganda" Steve Farace to explain what we had in mind. They got it right away and, what's more, they were game.

So here we are.

Or there we were, in early September at Crosby Hop Farm in Woodburn, Ore., invited to meet their team, tour the facilities and set the whole process in motion. (Crosby, which is powered by 100 percent renewable energy, has been growing hops since 1900.) During our sampling session, we met Blake Crosby, who represents the fifth generation of his family to oversee their 350 acres of hops. He had some suggestions for us, as did Zak Schroerlucke and Beau Evers, two members of his team with an encyclopedic knowledge of the brewing landscape.

As for the SweetWater folks, I knew we had found the right collaborators when Steve greeted us wearing a Dead & Company hat, while Nick and his wife MJ were happy to share memories of past performances by the good ol' Grateful Dead that, it turned out, all three of us had attended.

Of course, while music talk segued in and out of our conversations, we were there on a mission: to sample some hops, to talk about recipes and to enjoy some beer.

Don't worry you'll have your chance to enjoy *our* beer early in 2018.

Until then, I'll be your ace cub reporter.

I'm hyped up already (and hopped up as well).

Clockwise from top left

Kyle Hollingsworth inhales some fresh hops while an anxious Crosby staffer asks him to don a safety vest

Stripping the hops from the vine and cleaning away the leaves

Kyle, Dean Budnick and Nick Nock reveling in the fresh Amarillo

After visiting the farm, it was time to sample beers and talk recipes

The conveyor carries away the leafy excess

Visions of hop mountain!

Older, wiser, better dressed: Ian O'Neil, Dennis Ryan, John McCauley, Christopher Ryan (l-r)

Laura Partain

A DOUBLE SHOT OF

DEER TICK

The quartet once known as Rhode Island's rowdiest Americana act returns with two volumes *in* two volumes: acoustic and electric. *By* **JEWLY HIGHT**

IT'S SAFE TO SAY that Deer Tick has never been accused of slickness. If anything, the band's reputation has run in the opposite direction. There was a time when the members projected an indie-rock-style disregard for polish and professionalism and received as much attention for their benders and exploits as they did for their music making. "Deer Tick is pretty much a band about alcohol," declared a 2012 *Vice* story, in which the author spent the interview shotgunning beers with frontman John McCauley.

While the live shows always felt spontaneous, they could occasionally be downright slovenly. "People may have thought their time was wasted, that we were doing it on purpose and that we were trying to antagonize the audience," McCauley acknowledges now. "Our intentions were never malicious. Maybe somebody accidentally had too good of a time."

The good times that McCauley, guitarist Ian O'Neil, drummer Dennis Ryan and bassist Christopher Ryan shared were central to the chemistry between them. They all oozed youthful stamina, mischievous senses of humor and few inhibitions; but beneath all of the debauchery was an interest in musical forms that required greater finesse.

On Deer Tick's 2007 debut, *War Elephant*, McCauley covered "What Kind of Fool Am I?," a suave, self-scrutinizing pop standard that he'd picked up from the repertoire of Rat Pack member Sammy Davis Jr. McCauley's take on the tune had an

overripe quality. Sickly sweet strings billowed around his serrated vocal timbre over a cockeyed drum pattern. And he made a show of straining for the big finish.

Fans assumed that he must be making a mockery of Davis' crooning. "[F]reaking brilliant, hilarious, tragic, over-the-top, true-to-life rendition of this classic," crowed one YouTube commenter. "I would so clap in a cheesy way after they play[ed] this song at a show," another concurred.

The way McCauley played the song live reinforced the impression. In a bit of cell phone footage uploaded to the internet half a decade ago, he can be seen edgily pacing the stage, taking a huge gulp from a beer bottle, veering into a froggy caricature of a jazz singer and knocking himself in the forehead with his microphone. "I always felt like maybe any shortcomings I might have as a singer, I could always make up for it with antics or theatrics or something," he reflects.

There's no such hedging on Deer Tick's satisfying, new double album, simply titled *Deer Tick Vol. 1* and *Deer Tick Vol. 2*. This time, McCauley and his cohorts were ready to be more deliberate about their craft, refine wide-ranging impulses and start exploring the artistic possibilities of a more adult outlook.

* * *

MCCAULEY SIPS A PINT OF BEER in Dee's Country Cocktail Lounge, a dive bar just outside of East Nashville, the gentrifying, bohemian area where he lives with his wife, singer-songwriter Vanessa Carlton, and their toddler daughter Sidney. He's been here plenty of times, he says—clad in a Hawaiian-print button-down and jeans, hair neatly combed back—just "never before the sun goes down." He and Carlton may be parents now, but they still keep musicians' hours. "This has gotta be highly unusual," he wagers. "We have babysitters come in the morning instead of at night."

He glances over at the happy-hour entertainment, an acoustic duo ambling through a Guy Clark cover. In a low-key, neighborhood joint like this, McCauley could easily commandeer the mic for a song or two if he were so inclined—in Nashville, a city awash in brand-name musical talent, it's not that uncommon to see performers invite their artist buddies onstage—but he dismisses the idea offhand. "Uh, no. I truly believe that I do not have the chops to sit in with anybody—anytime I sit in with somebody, I embarrass myself," he says. Such self-deprecation is a reflex for McCauley. He neglects to mention the exclusive 2014 shindig where, at Dave Grohl's invitation, he sang a couple of songs with the surviving members of Nirvana, following their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

McCauley spent his teenage years absorbing Providence, R.I.'s noise-rock scene, so developing his instrumental and vocal chops wasn't his highest priority. Even after he discovered the heart-dragging honky-tonk of Hank Williams and nimble, nutty wit of country songwriter Roger Miller, McCauley valued personality over precision.

In the early days of Deer Tick, he recruited friends who could help him execute alt-country scruffiness and, when nobody was available to accompany him, he simply flew solo. But playing alone wasn't as fun. After covering many of the parts on *War Elephant* himself, he enlisted fresh-out-of-college Christopher Ryan and persuaded his half-brother Dennis Ryan to drop out and hit the road too. "I was really bad at going to class," Dennis clarifies on the phone.

Within a couple of years, O'Neil had joined them, having left behind his gig with the adrenalized punk outfit Titus Andronicus. In those days, O'Neil reflects on the phone, Deer Tick seemed to swerve between extremes. Anyone who'd heard *The Black Dirt Sessions*, his first album with the more permanent group, "expected [us] to just be a folk band," he explains. But they barely drew from its track list at all when they toured to promote it. "We just kind of threw ourselves into a very rock-and-roll period in our music, and our lives," he says.

The result was 2011's *Divine Providence*, a rackety ruckus of an album, featuring newly added keyboardist Rob Crowell, further enlarging the band's audience.

It was mildly shocking to hear the members give interviews describing the modest pop aspirations that shaped *Negativity*, the full-length that followed. They spoke, rather sheepishly, of their decision to bring in a producer, Los Lobos' Steve Berlin, who put them through their paces, pushing them to tighten their song structures and insert bridges here and there.

People interpreted that slight uptick in seriousness as a sign that McCauley and his cohorts were dialing back the debauchery, but he's quick to point out that he was still "partying like an asshole."

* * *

AT THE END OF 2014, DEER Tick marked their 10th anniversary with six shows at New York's Brooklyn Bowl, covering different classic albums—including Lou Reed's *Transformer*, Elvis Costello's *My Aim Is True* and their own *War Elephant*—as well as an array of cross-genre favorites. Stevie Nicks, who officiated McCauley's wedding, even sat in on New Year's Eve. Though the band's definitive lineup wasn't yet a decade old, it had been intact long enough for the members to arrive at an identity crisis of sorts. They tried to record an album that isolated the folky and rowdy sides of their sound—the template they'd eventually follow on *Vols. 1* and *2*—but grew frustrated and shelved the effort.

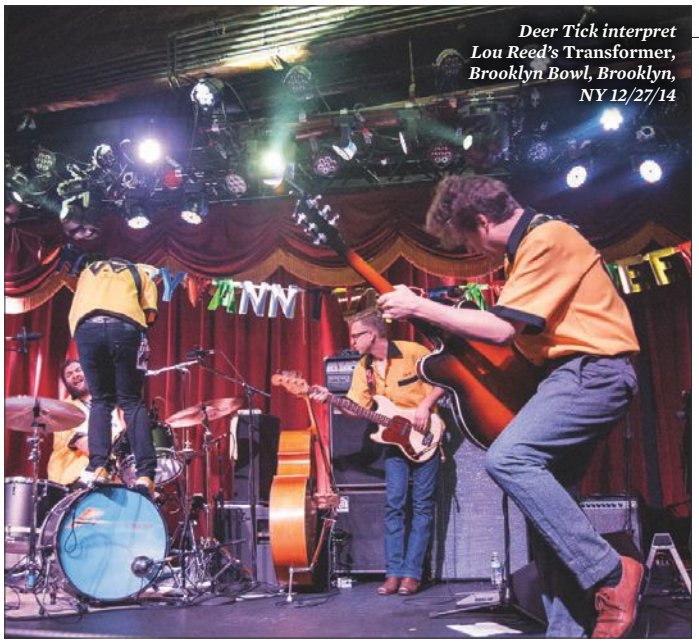
McCauley's doubt about the band's future weighed heavily on him. "There was a period of time," he confesses, "when I thought about picking up the phone every day and calling everybody and being like, 'Yeah, I don't want to do this anymore.'"

His bandmates contented themselves with tinkering on side projects. Dennis Ryan teamed with Two Gallants' Tyson Vogel in the deliberately misspelled La Mazz; partnered with Crowell and producer Adam Landry in a trio called Vincent Van Gold; and worked with Christopher Ryan, O'Neil and Ravi Shavi frontman Rafay Rashid in the band Happiness. Dennis and O'Neil basically became studio rats, perfecting their techniques in the process. "Ian and I were getting together basically every day and recording something and writing something," recalls Dennis.

As McCauley adjusted to new domestic realities, sometimes playing stay-at-home-dad to Sidney while Carlton toured, he also casually added to his toolkit. He fooled around with different guitar tunings. His keyboard skills improved drastically once his piano teacher mother-in-law taught him proper hand placement. And after scouring his record collection for music that he and his daughter could both enjoy, he landed on The Pogues. "One thing leads to another," he says. "I have an Irish bouzouki and a mandolin in the house, and an accordion, and I'm trying to learn all of them at once."

Upon reconvening for one of Deer Tick's famous Newport Folk Fest after-parties and an acoustic tour, the members, who'd settled into more stable relationships and temperate patterns during their time apart, experienced a renewed sense of camaraderie. "It took John being able to handle being out and playing, and not ruining our bodies or anything like we used to in our early twenties," O'Neil offers. "When he saw that everyone was onboard with making it a sustainable lifestyle, it probably invigorated him to write new music, too."

The band booked Memphis's Ardent Studios, partly because of the array of



Deer Tick interpret Lou Reed's Transformer, *Brooklyn Bowl, Brooklyn, NY 12/27/14*

Andrew Scott Blackstein

gear advertised on its website and partly because it was where The Replacements recorded their canonical LP *Pleased to Meet Me*. The facility happened to be running a half-off special in honor of its 50th anniversary, which came in handy considering that Deer Tick was recording two albums at once.

McCauley, O'Neil, the Ryan bothers and Crowell, who's since departed the band, agreed to abide by certain guidelines throughout the proceedings. Neither O'Neil nor McCauley would play a lick of electric guitar on the acoustic album, *Vol. 1*, and their bandmates would adjust accordingly, utilizing upright and hollow-body bass and coaxing softened textures from the drum kit with brushes and mallets. They would fashion the electrified *Vol. 2* into an outlet for their jagged intensity.

With their history of unruliness, the idea of imposing rules on themselves held real appeal. "I don't know if it's a getting older thing," Dennis muses, "but you start to really be like, 'Man, rules are awesome.' I feel like parameters can make things interesting because then you're not left to this world of endless choices."

Deer Tick being Deer Tick, the band packaged the contrasting musical modes in a way that feels impishly dumbed-down, slapping a still life of a ketchup bottle and mustard jar—the world's most basic and complementary condiments—on the cover of each album. (One is surrounded by a red picture frame; the other, yellow.) "I mean, our press release says, like, 'quiet and loud,' which is kind of a joke," notes McCauley. "But yeah, there's definitely a little more to it."

"With all of our disparate influences, I feel like we can do anything," ventures Christopher. "We don't really have any limitations on how a song could turn out, beyond our own aesthetics, where one person would be like, 'No, I think that sounds stupid' or 'I think that sounds pretentious.'"

The precise arrangements on *Vol. 1* incorporate flavors and grooves that seldom appear in the rest of band's body of work: the springy calypso-style syncopation of "Doomed From the Start;" a drolly spare take on jazzy piano balladry in "Cocktail;" a pristine palette of fingerpicking and delicate piano accents that lands on the folky side of adult contemporary in "Limp Right Back."

Some of the rowdiest cuts on *Vol. 2* are also some of the most vigorously tuneful, like "Jumpstarting," a wooly alt-rock song written and sung by McCauley; the galloping power-pop number "Tiny Fortunes," penned and performed by O'Neil; and the blistering boogie "Mr. Nothing Gets Worse," a collaboration between the two of them and Dennis, the band's other songwriter.

> "There was a period of time when I thought about picking up the phone every day and calling everybody and being like, 'Yeah, I don't want to do this anymore.'"
>
> JOHN MCCAULEY

The least expected inclusion is "Pulse," McCauley's instrumental response to the 2016 massacre at a queer nightclub in Orlando. It sounds like melancholy lounge jazz set to a lumbering beat. "I didn't feel up to the challenge of writing lyrics to it," says McCauley, "because I didn't want to risk screwing it up."

He was also more conscious of how he sang from track to track and album to album. Having sought treatment for a polyp on his vocal cord, he could whip out tricks for the acoustic material, "things like warm-ups and trying to make round shapes with my mouth," he says. The way he delivers "Cocktail," for instance, summoning exaggerated wistfulness and inserting affable nudges into his phrasing, is his version of crooning. But to give the other amped-up album the harsh, needling, attack vocal he's long been known for, McCauley's vocal exercises consisted of doing whiskey shots and puffing on cigarettes.

Lyrically, he and O'Neil tackle sobriety themes in the wryest of ways, digging at the media's insatiable appetite for recovery narratives. But McCauley, O'Neil and Dennis Ryan have also figured out how to inject tentative optimism into their portraits of human untrustworthiness. Perhaps that's a side effect of the band members taking stock of how their musical output aligns with where they are in their lives.

The big question they had to confront, says Christopher Ryan—who recently became the last member of Deer Tick to get hitched—was, "How do we take our lives more seriously? How do we make this vocation that we've all chosen more sustainable for our bodies, for our lives and for our families?"

Their answer? "It's just being smarter about it, trying to be more professional about it, while still struggling as hard as you can to never sacrifice the spunk that is rock-and-roll."

Believe it or not, Deer Tick even made the showbiz move of adopting a dress code. "We thought, 'Hey, we've been around for a while,'" says McCauley. "Maybe it's time that we ban a few articles of clothing from the stage, now that we're all adults. How about no more pajamas, no more sweatpants or sweatshirt, no more T-shirts?"

They certainly looked put together when they played a storied bluegrass dive in downtown Nashville during AMERICANAFEST in mid-September. Dennis Ryan, who used to be quite a schlump on the fashion front, was dressed in a custom-made, iridescent tribal-print tunic and harem pants. "What do you think of Dennis' clothes?" O'Neil prompted the crowd.

The band playfully flaunted a mastery of dynamics, ending "Me and My Man," a goofy number that Dennis wrote from point of view of his dog, with a measured decrescendo. As the last note evaporated, McCauley bounced on the balls of his feet, toy guitar in hand, and flashed a gratified grin.

He has reason to feel good about Deer Tick 2.0. "Maybe we don't run around as much or get hurt as frequently onstage," he allows, "but we still put on a show."

Les Claypool

Paul Haggard

A GIFT FROM A RAVEN ON A STORMY NIGHT

On their first original studio album in over 20 years, the classic Primus lineup is still thriving on the border of cartoonish and creepy.

By **RYAN REED**

LES CLAYPOOL DIDN'T HAVE TO strain finding the inspiration for Primus' ninth LP, *The Desaturating Seven*, a proggy conceptual suite framed around Ul de Rico's psychedelic 1978 children's book, *The Rainbow Goblins*. The animated text, he jokes, "was brought to [him] by a raven on a stormy night." That's a fitting origin story for such a kaleidoscopic album which, like the Italian illustrator's innovative fairy tale, follows a group of gluttonous goblins on their ill-fated quest to devour the colors of the rainbow. But the reality is far more practical.

"My kids have shitloads of books," says the 54-year-old singer/bassist and father of two. "They were avid readers, and before they could read, my wife was reading to them every night before bed. There were stacks and stacks of books. And every now and again, I'd be the guy going in to read. So I went in one night years ago, and there was this goblin book. I'm like, 'What the hell is this?' I just started reading through it. The story has the dark elements of some of the old *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, which are creepy and horrifying. But I was mostly taken aback by the artwork. It's dark, but it's also beautiful and vibrant and colorful. You associate rainbows with freedom and liberal thinking and progressive sexuality, so to see these joyous, vibrant colors in this dark context was very interesting."

That contrast also defines *The Desaturating Seven*, which—like Primus' most distinctive work from the mid-'90s—thrives on the border of cartoonish and creepy. But the experimental rock trio also tapped into a real-world relevance, one particularly surprising for an album of "goblin rock." Where much of the band's work is driven by pure irreverence (1995's Grammy-nominated "Wynona's Big Brown Beaver" from *Tales From the Punchbowl* has lost none of its wackiness over the past two decades), their new color-coded fantasias tap into the modern malaise of Trump's America.

"It's about the people in power taking more than their share and the adverse effects of that—and the masses coming together and overpowering those entitled powers," Claypool says of the LP's not-so-hidden themes. "It's very relevant to what's going on with the planet."

But how do you write a socially conscious concept album about rainbow-ingesting goblins? That's one tricky balancing act between campy escapism and metaphorical commentary, and Claypool admits he struggled to avoid falling totally into parody.

"If you look at the lyrics, I don't know if I mention the word 'goblins' even once in the entire thing," he says. "And I tried not to mention 'rainbows' either, but it's in there every now and again. I used metaphors to propel the narrative forward. You're riding a fine line when you're writing about rainbows and goblins. You can easily go down the *My Little Pony*, crystal unicorn path and have it just be this big bucket of *fromage*. So I was trying to have it not be so literal but amplify some of the morals that de Rico was trying to convey. And it was kind of hard, like, 'How can I say this without it coming off like a Tenacious D song?'"

His first step was carving out a play-like structure—crafting the climactic epic "The Storm," which recalls vintage Pink Floyd with its echoing bass riff and eerie crescendos, then working backward. Piece by piece, the songs fell into place, but Claypool wasn't even sure where this material would wind up. The obvious move would have been to call up his friend and collaborator Sean Lennon, with whom he'd recently issued a wildly trippy collaborative LP, 2016's *Monolith of Phobos*. Besides, he figured his Primus bandmates would balk at the indulgent concept.

"Basically, I wrote the song that became 'The Storm,' and I played it for [guitarist Larry "Ler" LaLonde] over the phone," he says. "I didn't know if he was going to like it. It's pretty Dungeons & Dragons, artsy, '70s art-rock. But he almost shit himself. He was like, 'Ahh, this is amazing.' So I was like, 'Alright, we gotta do this with Primus.' I'd been pretty on-the-fence, like, 'Should I do this with Primus? With Sean?' But because of Ler's enthusiasm, it was like, 'OK, this has gotta be a Primus project,' and it just snowballed from there."

LaLonde echoes that he was immediately grabbed by Claypool's embryonic songs—and de Rico's cult-classic book. "I'd never heard of [*The Rainbow Goblins*], and I have kids, so I was amazed there was a kids book I hadn't read 1,000 times," he says, laughing. "For a kids book, it was trippy, a little bit creepy and the artwork was so amazing. I was saying, 'I could see us flying with this for the live show.'"

"When this idea came around, it wasn't a traditional situation, like, 'Let's get together and start from scratch,'" he adds. "I'm sure that's probably what the next one will be. We had a lot of ideas that probably would have been on this one, were it not a themed thing. There were ideas already mapped out since Les had been thinking about this for a while. But we just put the icing [on the cake] to turn it into Primus proper."

* * *

PRIMUS HAS BEEN IN A polychromatic headspace these days: *The Desaturating*

Primus performing at the Fox Theater, Oakland, Calif., 12/31/14

Seven follows their 2014 reimagining of the *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* soundtrack, a project the band exploited onstage with costumes (Claypool dressed up as the titular candy maestro, top hat and all), and stage props like massive lollipops and mushrooms. A few years ago, the bassist even toyed with recording a full-LP take on The Beatles' 1967 opus, *Magical Mystery Tour*, but he changed his mind after learning how much legwork The Flaming Lips put into their collaborative version of *Sgt. Pepper's*. "That was something I'd been thinking about," he says. "But after talking to Wayne [Coyne] and hearing about the pain in the ass it was dealing with *Sgt. Pepper* and all the people involved in that, it doesn't seem like I'll be doing anything like that in the near future."

Overall, *Wonka* felt like a good-natured detour, rather than a fresh route. *The Desaturating Seven*—the first album of original material in over 20 years to feature the definitive Primus lineup of Claypool, LaLonde and drummer Tim "Herb" Alexander—is different. Its whimsical subject matter only works because the music finds Primus at their most primal. And Claypool and LaLonde credit most of that vibe to their innate chemistry with Alexander, whose intricate, prog-leaning style helped ground the band early on. The classic Primus trio recorded early favorites like 1991's *Sailing the Seas of Cheese* and 1995's *Tales From the Punchbowl,* before the drummer quit in 1996, replaced by Bryan "Brain" Mantia. (He'd later rejoin in 2003 and stick around for sporadic tours in the mid-aughts before splitting again in 2010. Drummer Jay Lane assisted on 2011's *Green Naugahyde*, and Alexander returned once more in 2013.)

Claypool acknowledges that friction, both personal and musical, helps generate this chemistry.

"It's an interesting dynamic because we all live separate from each other now," he says. "But it's not socially, like we all go hang. Tim's always been the guy on the outskirts of the band, hence him coming in and out over the years. We don't necessarily see eye-to-eye on a lot of things, musically. I wouldn't say there's a conflict because it's not an aggressive thing. It can just be awkward sometimes, but that contrast is what gives us the sound. When playing with other people who are a little more like-minded in what we're thinking, you don't get as interesting a contrast. It just makes you approach things a little differently. But also, I feel like the band has come around a little more to that way of thinking now. It's like, I can exercise my groove-oriented demons with my other projects, or even the psychedelic stuff with me and Sean doing the Delirium. So with me, Ler and Tim, we can go back to some of that hard-edged stuff we were known for in the mid-'90s and be comfortable with it. I'm not personally trying to scratch a different itch."

> "You're riding a fine line when you're writing about rainbows and goblins." LES CLAYPOOL

"It's also that we're in a similar headspace right now," he adds. "When we all first jammed with Herb, we sat down and started playing Rush tunes because it was common ground for the three of us. It was like, 'Oh, he knows how to play Rush tunes, so let's play Rush.' But I was coming from playing with drummers like Jay Lane who were more groove-oriented. We were playing Isley Brothers songs and shit like that. It was a different mindset. So for this record, especially, it was, 'Alright, I'm gonna write a record about goblins, and we're gonna be scratching a lot of old art and prog-rock itches we hadn't scratched in a while,' and that really lent itself to his style of playing."

LaLonde, meanwhile, was just excited for the three of them to work on a "real Primus thing" together following *Wonka*. "It was pretty exciting to play all this crazy stuff and come up with crazy parts that only Tim can play," he says. "We call him 'the octopus' because it sounds like he's playing eight things at once. He looks like an octopus when he's playing it. I'm like, 'How's he doing that?'"

With its best-known lineup in peak form, Primus is enjoying yet another birth. But to some extent, it's shocking that any version of Primus even survived the late-'90s, when a general feeling of displacement from the record industry nearly tore the band apart. The result was 1999's *Antipop*, their presciently titled sixth LP, which featured a comically wide array of guest producers (including Tom Waits, Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello, Limp Bizkit frontman Fred Durst and *South Park* co-creator Matt Stone). The band was flailing for a direction, confused about their status in a rock scene filled with chart-topping bands who had dumbed down elements of Primus' surreal, cross-pollinated style for mass consumption under the burgeoning style of "nü-metal."

"There was a lot of tension," Claypool says. "There was a lot of horse shit going on around that album. It took me a long time before I could even listen to it again. I've listened to it recently, and there's actually a lot of cool shit on there, but it was just a difficult record to make because there was friction. There were a lot of bands that were coming up on our coattails that became very popular, and the record company was like, 'Hey, you should be like these guys. They came from your world.' And it's like, 'I don't want to be like those guys!' We'd never been second-guessed before. It was always, 'Let Primus do their own thing. It always works. It's successful. Just leave them alone.' And all of the sudden, we were being second-guessed. It just sucked. It was just an awful time."

Primus often seemed too extreme, too fucking bizarre, to continue their unlikely ascent into rock history. But here they are, almost three decades later, still surviving—first through their three-year "hiatus," then through the endless drummer shifts and high-profile side projects. In 2017, they feel like the pioneers of a genre that no one has the adjectives to describe. And though their talents could easily survive a permanent breakup, they're aware of their rare synergy.

"There are certain things that just feel like Primus," Claypool says, referencing the trademark prog-funk of recent single "The Seven." "When I started playing that song, I just said, 'That just feels like a fucking Primus riff.' That song is just definitive Primus. If you hear that, you're gonna go, 'Oh, that's Primus!'" R

Jay Blakesberg

Ingrid Pop

DEEP INTO THE BLUE

More than two decades after their last album, the members of Slowdive are back with a sublime second act.

By **BILL MURPHY**

SLOWDIVE WEREN'T ALWAYS considered art-rock royalty and, believe it or not, "shoegazing" was once a dirty word—a shorthand initially coined by Andy Ross, head of the British label Food Records, that morphed into a putdown as soon as British rockcrits got wind of it. In hindsight, of course, the term sounds way too cool not to have been reclaimed by the very musicians it was meant to ridicule. When up-and-coming bands like Blur, Moose, Chapterhouse, Ride and Swervedriver played entire sets while supposedly looking down at their shoes, they weren't just cobbling together a youthful display of alienation or rebellion. (Although, these were definitely *part* of the message.) The mission was communal, creative and practical, too.

Driven by a post-Thatcher hangover and a creeping sense of dread, British rock circa 1990 had started to turn inward, with an emerging generation of artists taking sustenance from sheer volume, sonic experimentation and lyrics that often pitted a dreamworld of mind expansion and unconditional love against the harsh realities of day-to-day drudgery and busted relationships. Guitar effects—distortion in particular—were the tools of the trade, so to keep your onstage act together, you had to direct some attention toward those stompboxes (and lyric sheets) at your feet.

Throw in the blissfully stoned crowds of punters who were hungry to absorb all that extra overdrive, and the ingredients were in place to spark a vibrant new scene in London's clubs. The flashpoint came in late 1991, when My Bloody Valentine released their landmark album *Loveless*. Suddenly, shoegaze was no longer an anomaly—it was a full-fledged, homegrown movement. And Slowdive was right in the middle of it.

"Actually, I'm really fond of the term 'shoegaze,'" says Neil Halstead today, without the slightest hint of irony. Back in the late-'80s, he and childhood friend Rachel Goswell shared a devotion to bands like The Cure, Pixies and Cocteau Twins as well as Siouxsie and the Banshees, whose song "Slowdive" gave the two budding songwriters the name they needed to start their own group. The lineup settled into a five-piece unit with third guitarist Christian Savill, bassist Nick Chaplin and drummer Simon Scott, and together they crafted a sound that was less reliant on distortion but still came across as massive. It was dreampop on steroids: a textbook blueprint for shoegaze.

"Obviously when we first heard about it in the press, we knew 'shoegazing' was meant to be dismissive," Halstead continues. "But in the end, it was reclaimed by the kids who really just loved the music. It became *their* music. I think that's brilliant, so I'm proud to be considered part of the tradition. There's something quite lovely about the fact that it's grown into something that people can identify with."

* * *

SHOEGAZE VERY NEARLY sputtered into oblivion. By the mid-'90s, most of London's shoegaze bands had either broken up or recalibrated toward radio-ready Britpop. Slowdive, for their part, rode an uneasy wave. Their early EPs—the self-titled *Slowdive* in particular—drew raves from critics, but by the time they released the drowsy, druggy, orchestrally infused *Souvlaki* (with Brian Eno contributing synths to a pair of songs) in 1993, the party was nearly over. 1995's minimalist, experimental *Pygmalion* was essentially a kiss-off to their label, who'd asked for a pop record now that Oasis and Suede were dominating the charts.

Even so, for Halstead and Goswell, *Pygmalion* opened a window into their next phase with Mojave 3—their stripped-down trio with Ian McCutcheon that initially explored an amalgam of dreampop and acoustic folk. And that might have been the final nail for Slowdive; Mojave 3 made five albums over the next 12 years before going on hiatus in 2008. Halstead followed that with a pair of excellent solo turns on Jack Johnson's Brushfire label, digging deeper into his spirit-haunted connection with British folk music. But then one night toward the end of 2013, he asked Goswell to join him for one of his acoustic shows in London.

"Rachel had come to sing a few songs," says Halstead, "and, as it turned out, the rest of the band was going to be there as well. An old friend of ours, Nathaniel Cramp, who was promoting the show, had said, 'You know, if Rachel's gonna do Slowdive songs with you, you guys should all get up and do them.' And we all said, 'We've never played anything acoustic. If we did something, we'd do it electric.' And there you go. I suppose the discussion started out as a joke, but we were all slightly surprised to find that everyone in the group was actually open to the idea. Then it was like, 'Well, maybe we could. Maybe we *should*.'"

By then, shoegaze had already left its indelible mark on a second wave of indie bands—Animal Collective, Tame Impala, Godspeed You! Black Emperor and Deerhunter among them—which, in turn, heated up interest in the music's pioneers. In early 2014, Slowdive announced their reunion for a festival performance at Barcelona's Primavera Sound. They played for an ecstatic throng of more than 25,000 people—a far cry from the dreaded empty room that greeted them at one of their last U.K. dates before their breakup in 1995.

"That invitation came almost completely out of the blue," Halstead notes, "and it was a big factor in our thinking, 'Well, let's give it a go and just see if we can do it.' But the whole thing about getting back together was that it was important for us to aim to make a record. That was definitely another big part of the equation."

* * *

IT WASN'T QUITE LIKE RIDING A bike, but when Halstead and his mates started working on demos after wrapping up a string of tour dates, they found inspiration in the familiar. They returned to the scene of all their past recordings, Courtyard Studio in the bucolic environs of Oxfordshire, west of London, and patiently cranked out eight new songs that surge with confidence, maturity and depth. They also had the temerity to title the album simply *Slowdive*—a throwback to their very first EP, as well as a call to arms announcing their return.

"Doing all those shows really was great for us," Halstead observes, "because it enabled us to go into the studio and not feel like we'd just started from zero. So we had some momentum, but it was still a slow process. We worked on the record for two years, and it took us a while to find something cohesive. We went down a few different alleyways and pushed the sound in various directions before we realized we had a batch of material that seemed to work. It felt like it was something new for us, but also it wasn't vastly unfamiliar."

Among the new: an unabashed pop song in "Sugar for the Pill," which recaptures the shimmery, dreamy sound of days past, but with a straight-

The Proud Godparents of Shoegaze: Neil Halstead, Simon Scott, Christian Savill, Rachel Goswell, Nick Chaplin (l-r)

"There was always that energy between us as musicians. I think that's always been an important part of Slowdive."
NEIL HALSTEAD

ahead verse-chorus structure and a sticky melody that lingers long after the final ringing guitar note. (The song probably benefits the most from the mixing talents of Chris Coady, known for his touch on albums by Yeah Yeah Yeahs, TV on the Radio, Grizzly Bear and, in particular, Beach House, a band favorite.) Further on, "No Longer Making Time" showcases the collective ability of Savill, Chaplin and Scott to take a quiet, understated groove and explode it into a sonic wash, with Halstead and Goswell intoning the lines "Forever we'll be/ together we breathe/ no longer far to run," perfectly encapsulating the bittersweetness of getting older. And then with the bookends of the opener "Slomo," a bracing, immersive and mutating slice of shoegaze, and the closer "Falling Ashes," a dark, slow-building meditation on a hypnotically repeating piano theme, it becomes clear that Slowdive doesn't have any intention of relying solely on past glories. Instead, now a bit further removed from their impetuous youth, they've managed to rediscover a profound sense of excitement in working together.

"There was always that energy between us as musicians," Halstead says. "I think that's always been an important part of Slowdive." He's especially fired up by the possibilities that the new material presents on the road, as the band continues to tour throughout 2017. "That's really the fun part of touring: when you're playing new stuff and you get that real sense of uncertainty. It's weird. It doesn't matter how much you rehearse a song: It doesn't really ever start to come together until you do it in front of an audience. I mean, we've never been particularly precious about that, but I think the songs have to have their own life beyond the record. So it'll be interesting to see how they develop."

Ingrid Pop

THE ART OF ACROBATICS

Twiddle stays limber while pursuing its path

By **DEAN BUDNICK**

TWIDDLE CERTAINLY knows how to Tumble Down in style.

In July 2016, the Vermont-based quartet launched a two-day festival at Waterfront Park in Burlington.

The group's fourth and final set of their inaugural Tumble Down event began with a guest appearance by Holly Bowling on electric piano for the Twiddle original "Hattie's jam," which then led, as it typically does, into a version of "When It Rains, It Poors." Bowling remained onstage for this tune and then three minutes into the song, Phish keyboardist Page McConnell walked out and joined the five musicians.

It was quite a moment, in particular, for Twiddle keyboardist Ryan Dempsey, who grew up in Burlington and idolized McConnell. In fact, Dempsey and Twiddle co-founding guitarist Mihali Savoulidis first bonded over their mutual enthusiasm for Phish's "Stash" when they met as recent high-school graduates at an orientation for Castleton State College (now Castleton University) in 2004.

"I was ecstatic that Page came out to see us," Dempsey acknowledges. "He was there watching the first set with his wife and we briefly talked. I realized I would beat myself up if didn't ask him to come up and play. When he did, it was one of the greatest moments of my life."

But wait, there's more.

Tumble Down returned to Waterfront Park this past July and the version of "When It Rains, It Poors" that Twiddle performed during their second set on opening night featured another guest musician, none other than Grateful Dead bass player Phil Lesh.

"There was a moment during one of the jam solo parts of this song and I was looking at his hand, and he was doing this really cool run on his higher strings," Savoulidis recalls. "So he was doing an ascending thing and I was doing a descending thing and we met in the middle on the same note, and it was a pretty cool little moment for me. But to have Phil and Page both play on that song is still kind of hard to believe. It's one of those things that, when it was happening, I had one of those realizations like, 'I'm going to remember this for the rest of my life. I'll totally be recalling right now, forever.' That's a strange feeling to have."

Dempsey recollects another resonant moment that took place at Castleton's Casella Theater, while he was still an undergrad. "It was our first big show and we didn't have that much material. It was packed, though, which probably meant about 200 people. And while we were in the greenroom underneath the stage, I could hear people stomping as loud as they could, screaming 'Twiddle!' I can remember thinking, 'I want to do this for the rest of my life, if it can work.'"

Savoulidis shared similar sentiments about his career goals, but with less anxiety about the likelihood that they would come to fruition. While Dempsey would remain at Castleton to secure his baccalaureate, Savoulidis soon weaned himself off classroom attendance en route to a truncated collegiate career. Dempsey remembers he respected that his friend "knew what he wanted from the beginning, and he was going to get it. I was like 'I need a plan B in case anything happens.' But he was like, 'No, we're going to be musicians, and that's the way it's going to be.'"

* * *

TWIDDLE HAS EMERGED AT THE forefront of a new generation of improvisational polyglots, drawing on a variety of genres and referencing earlier groups who blended multiple styles of music into a new form.

Savoulidis grew up in Maplewood, N.J., about 20 miles outside of Manhattan. During his teenage years, he'd take the train to explore the sights and sounds of the city. Beyond some underage barhopping and general cultural enlightenment in Greenwich Village, the budding guitarist made a steady effort to find his way into live performances whenever possible. An early formative experience was seeing The String Cheese Incident at Radio City Music Hall. ("Some guy miracled me a ticket and the show was phenomenal.")

He is also of the "festival nation" generation and recalls that during the summer of 2001, at age 15, he attended both the Gathering of the Vibes and the Berkshire Mountain Music Festival. "My mom gave me the thumbs up because my older brother was going to take me. I completely immersed myself in what was happening. Until that point, my only live music experiences had been some Dave Matthews shows and a few other things, but certainly nothing as cool as Vibes. It was like some fairy-tale land that I didn't think existed, and it did."

"I went to Berkfest that same summer," he continues. "I remember Leftover Salmon specifically. Blue Floyd was another band that stuck out. Steve Kimock, Soulive—I saw all these people for the very first time and when I got home from those festivals, I had this whole new world of music to listen to. It inspired me to want to get better at guitar. That's what opened the door for everything that's happening now."

Dempsey, by contrast, had an altogether different upbringing. "Classical music kind of got me started. I was growing up in a Christian home, and some music was not allowed. I was homeschooled for five years, and my parents did their best to shelter me from a lot of secular music. It was all out of love," he says. "Even the church I went to said that I wasn't allowed to listen to Mozart because it wasn't about God. So when we'd go on youth trips, they'd be like, 'You can't listen to Mozart because if he was in a bad mood and wrote music, then that might put you in a bad mood, and that's not OK.' But my dad's really into jazz, so I had a lot of good jazz influences from him, and we listened to musicals and stuff like that. I wasn't allowed to listen to Nirvana but I was sitting there learning *Les Misérables* songs at 11 or 12 years old."

During high school, Dempsey found his way to Béla Fleck and the Flecktones and, by the time he met Savoulidis, he had come to appreciate Phish. Still, when it came to many of the artists who colored the guitarist's musical palette, Dempsey was a complete neophyte. Savoulidis credits this unique perspective, and Dempsey's ability to absorb a range of styles while maintaining his own musical personality, as a defining element of the band's sound.

Their association began with some fortuitous seating selections at that Castleton orientation a couple months before school started, with

Team Twiddle: Brook Jordan, Mihali Savoulidis, Zdenek Gubb and Ryan Dempsey (clockwise from top left)

Jay Blakesberg

Savoulidis settling in directly behind Dempsey. A conversation that began with casual remarks on the college's acting curriculum swiftly gravitated to music. The two soon expressed a mutual interest in meeting up at Phish's Coventry festival and then decided to foster a more immediate musical connection by fleeing the orientation and locating a piano so that Dempsey could jam with Savoulidis, who had brought his acoustic.

When Savoulidis had first mentioned that he was a guitarist, Dempsey asked him whether he could play a seventh chord because, as he now recalls, "everyone says they play the guitar. But then, when he played for me, I realized, 'He's really good. And way better than me.'"

By the time they entered college that fall, they already had plans to seek out some like-minded players and form a band.

Twiddle's first official gig took place at Castleton's Fireside Café in January 2005 and the group really picked things up in earnest the following year as Savoulidis decided to immerse himself in his music by jettisoning his academic pursuits.

"From the beginning, he never really planned to finish college," Dempsey suggests. "His goal was to start a band. He just sat in the dorm room and would play music. I remember when we became roommates a year later, he just didn't go to class. He paid for an extra semester, and I would keep trying to wake him up. He would be like, 'No I'm just going to write music.' When they kicked him out, he and I found a house together at Eagle Rock [in nearby Hubbardtown, VT] and we wrote music there. It was up in the mountains, and there was a waterfall in the background. It was just a beautiful place to write music in the middle of Vermont."

During this era, Savoulidis focused on the playful yet complex material that would come to define Twiddle. The lineup remained in flux for a little while as the co-founders sought out a rhythm section that shared a similar spirit and could best serve the songs.

They found drummer Brook Jordan, who was then a high school senior in nearby Rutland, through a production of the musical *Hair* at Castleton. While playing in the musical's orchestra pit, Savoulidis met bassist Billy Comstock, himself a Rutland High senior, who then introduced them to Jordan. Savoulidis credits the drummer with having "an incredible musical memory. He's constantly listening to music and he can sing every word of a song if he hears it one time. We use that when we're writing."

For a period of time, both Jordan and Comstock were in the group until Comstock elected to pursue formal musical studies at Berklee College of Music. They replaced him with Zdenek Gubb, who Savoulidis hails as "the best bass player out there. It feels like every time he touches his bass, he's got some new crazy riff or new cool thing he can do that I didn't even think was possible."

Dempsey remembers that they connected with Gubb through the social networking platform of the moment. "We found him through MySpace," the keyboardist says with a laugh. "We'd heard about a bass player from the Manchester area of Vermont that was playing with the band, and he had a MySpace page. So Mickey [Mihali] and I got together, we looked it up, we listened to the band, and we were like, 'Wow, he's good. Let's give him a call and audition him.' He was like 16 or 17 at the time and, after high school, he immediately moved up to Eagle Rock with us."

"When the four of us first started playing, it was all about 'Look at me. Look how many notes I can play,'" he adds, "But now, we also realize that four different people are coming together. We're finding our sound every day, listening and letting it build, letting it create itself. Everyone's done a good job at collaborating, being connected and staying in it while improvising. We've grown so much over the past 10 years."

* * *

TUMBLE DOWN HAS BEEN something of a culmination for Twiddle. In the years leading up the festival's debut, the group put in the roadwork, gradually expanding their geographic ambit from Vermont to New England to the entire Northeast, to the point where the quartet is now a true national act. During the past two years, Twiddle has welcomed peers and tourmates to the festival like Turkuaz, Cabinet, Midnight North, Aqueous, Madaila and Holly Bowling, as well as the aforementioned icons such as Lesh and McConnell.

Of course, bringing it all back home is also important to the narrative. "I grew up in Burlington, one of the most beautiful places in Vermont," Dempsey says. "To be playing in that area, right on the water, watching the sunset, is such an amazing experience and it's a great way to get fans to Burlington to see what Vermont's all about."

Another layer of the Burlington connection surfaced in 2017 when Twiddle brought out The Giant Country Horns, who once joined Phish for a celebrated 1991 summer tour (and a few subsequent shows). Given Twiddle's rising stature, some bands might have been self-conscious or reluctant to extend such an invitation, but the fact that they weren't wary of this, says something about the group's sense of purpose and intent. They take their music, but not themselves, seriously.

"We really weren't concerned about anything, other than the opportunity to

work with people we admire," Savoulidis affirms. "I have always been a huge fan of The Giant Country Horns and the work they did with Phish. Those are some of my favorite shows to listen to. Dave Grippo is in Burlington, we've chatted a bunch in the past and he's sat in with Twiddle before. When I saw that some of the other guys were doing the Jazz is Phish shows in New York when we were going to be at Irving Plaza, I thought, 'Man, we should see if we can get the three original guys.' So we reached out and they were so good that we decided to add them to Tumble Down. I thought it would be cool to hear what they could do to our music. Why wouldn't we want to do it if they were available? That's kind of our attitude. Then we had the opportunity to work with them and it was a real blessing." (They'll also appear with Twiddle on New Year's Eve in Albany, N.Y.)

Elliott Peck, Phil Lesh and Grahame Lesh join Twiddle at Tumble Down, 7/28/17

Beyond all of this, Tumble Down is significant in its own right because festivals have been so consequential to the band. In 2012, Twiddle made the first of multiple appearances at the Gathering of the Vibes, the event that had once energized the 15-year-old Savoulidis. Subsequently, the quartet has made its way to Bonnaroo, Lockn', Summer Camp, Wanee, Peach and many others.

The festival that may be nearest to the band's heart, however, is Vermont's Frendly Gathering, where Twiddle has appeared every year since snowboarders Danny Davis, Jack Mitrani and their Frends crew launched the campout in 2011. "When they started it, they were just throwing a party for friends and we were the local band," Savoulidis notes. "But we went there and the overall vibe of the festival had such an impact on us—the caring nature of everyone and their motto 'No I in Frends,' putting the other fellow first and being good to your neighbor. That really resonated with us. I work harder at Frendly Gathering than at any other event in the summer. I try to play as much as I can, and meet and hang out with the fans and everybody who takes part in the festival. Frendly Gathering has been one of the biggest blessings for us in terms of cultivating a beautiful fan base with a great message. My lyrical message changed when I started to think about that."

This shift in focus manifested itself on the band's most recent recording project. In January 2015, Twiddle announced a Kickstarter campaign to support a new 2-CD studio record, their first such recording since 2011's *Somewhere on the Mountain*, itself the follow-up to the group's 2007 debut *The Natural Evolution of Consciousness.*

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LIFE AFTER DEAD

After a four-year breather between albums and a deep-dive into the Grateful Dead's lexicon, The National returns relaxed, recharged and ready to embrace their inner Bee Gees.

By **MIKE GREENHAUS**

WHEN MATT BERNINGER was still an unknown twentysomething floating in the New York dot-com bubble, he used to walk along East Houston Street from his office in the Puck Building to the Mercury Lounge and see what the cool kids were up to. It was the late-'90s and, once again, both New York City and its patented garage-rock sound had returned from the great beyond, only to be reclaimed by a new generation that would, in turn, eventually leave it all behind for the next class to find.

Matt, along with the rest of his future National bandmates, came of age in Cincinnati at a time when Ohio acts like Guided by Voices and The Afghan Whigs were redefining alt-rock ambitions in the MTV '80s. He had some local success with his own lo-fi band in college and, upon arriving in the Big Apple, he'd check out seminal early shows by highly stylized guitar-rock groups like The Strokes and Interpol. But, even though he didn't really have a band, he knew he was capable of making something more long-lasting.

"We already had a bit of a chip on our shoulders, as far as what music was, when that whole Lower East Side explosion was happening," he says almost 20 years later, as he prepares to roll out The National's seventh full-length LP, and first after an uncharacteristic four-year pause, *Sleep Well Beast*. "We'd already been on the outside of a hipster scene once, and then we moved to Brooklyn and that put us in a package. So we went from being a Cincinnati band to being a Lower East Side band to being a Brooklyn band, and now I don't know what we are." He pauses, reconsiders his band's status as citizens of the world and laughs. "We're a French band. We're the next Phoenix."

It's a misty Friday morning in mid-July, and the singer and his bandmates—bassist Scott Devendorf, Scott's drummer brother Bryan and twin guitarists-cum-multi-instrumentalists/producers Aaron and Bryce Dessner—have convened in Hudson, N.Y., to kick off the *Sleep Well Beast*-era of their career with an immersive, multiday "Guilty Party" gathering at Basilica Hudson (a former 19th-century factory that's

now a non-profit performance and exhibition space). During the weekend, The National will play all the tracks off their forthcoming record—including several debuts—in front of an intimate audience of friends, family and fast-fingered ticket buyers. A number of the musicians who appear on the record—Mouse on Mars, Sō Percussion, Nadia Sirota, Buke and Gase—are on hand as well, and will open for the group and perform throughout their set while tucked away in the venue's four corners. Fans who wander around The National's circular stage will have the unique opportunity to zoom in on their contributions, depending on where they choose to stand.

The National have long outlasted most of the bands that Matt watched explode into the blogosphere, either in terms of consistent output or overarching cultural impact, yet the group's New York genesis has been on his mind recently. His early strolls across the gentrifying Bowery section of Manhattan are documented throughout Lizzy Goodman's new oral history of New York during the decade after 9/11, *Meet Me in the Bathroom*. And *Sleep Well Beast* is The National's first album to truly dig into the band's own story and tropes with a removed perspective. On "Born to Beg," Matt offers an epitaph for the scene that nurtured him: "New York is older/ And changing its skin again/ It dies every 10 years/ And then it begins again/ If your heart was in it/ I'd stay a minute."

At the moment, though, The National and their entourage have taken over a small downtown inn for a day of meetings and interviews (as well as an informal happy hour). The members of the band are interviewed in small groups; Aaron and Bryce are currently paired in the lobby while Matt and the Devendorfs are holding court in the bar space. All five musicians appear far more relaxed than usual, a result of both their success over the years and their recent time in the Grateful Dead's orbit—in particular, Matt, who sucks a vape pen as he talks, and Aaron have adopted a more casual look over the years and grown out their hair.

These days, it takes quite a bit of coordination to even get the entire band in the same building: Matt currently lives in Venice Beach, Calif., Bryan has returned home to Cincinnati, Scott resides in Long Island, N.Y., and Bryce has homes in Paris and the Catskills. Aaron's set up shop in Hudson, which has grown into the band's de facto Big Pink-like home base, but has spent a good chunk of time recently with his wife's family in Denmark. The National's diaspora started before the group released their previous album, 2013's *Trouble Will Find Me*, but *Sleep Well Beast* is the quintet's first record to truly absorb the sounds of those varied zip codes. And, for the first time, a minimalist European undercurrent guides The National's homegrown Midwest-meets-New York post-punk/classic-rock mélange.

"[In Europe], they have a very different approach to money and success—there's an endless rat race in America," says Bryce. "There's a word in French, *métier*, which means, 'what you do.' It's why Americans find French waiters rude. Their job is not necessarily to serve you; their job is more the ritual of just making things. The musicians I know there are really talented, but they don't necessarily have the success of our American peers. And, politically, in France—I've lived there through all the terrorist attacks, and then them electing an actually intelligent human being as president, compared to what's happened here."

If *Trouble Will Find Me* was the culmination of the classic National sound that they've honed since 2005's *Alligator*, and was responsible for finally moving the group into select arenas and sheds stateside, then *Sleep Well Beast* is the start of their next phase. The ensemble's trademark, wine-drunk lyrics, lush, orchestrated soundscapes and clever indie-rock hooks remain, but the entire record moves with a new, German-electronic pulse, courtesy of the Dessners' recent time abroad.

The National's music has always felt like the soundtrack to an elegant affair with a slightly devious undercurrent—*Sleep Well Beast* plays out like the score for that evening soirée if it were still simmering at sunrise the next morning.

"*Trouble Will Find Me* had these classic National songs," Aaron says. "They're very well written and conceived. I see quite a different feeling in this record. There's a lot more openness and possibility and space in the music. It's less about good songwriting than it is about being a band."

"We exist between the Grateful Dead and the Velvet Underground," Bryce adds. "We're equally borne of the DNA of punk-rock and psychedelic, spacey improvisation. In different camps of the band, those two things may resonate deeper. But they translated, this time, in some interesting ways. Maybe there's a uniqueness about the Dead's language, and somehow we'd gone out the other side."

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AARON COMMENCED WORK ON *Sleep Well Beast* while The National were still touring behind *Trouble Will Find Me*. During the winter of 2014-15, Bryce joined him to "mind-meld" at a country church near his home and, by that April, the entire band had gathered for the first time to start sorting through those ideas. The group carved out a few additional working trips in New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere; they worked on the set's lead single, "The System Only Dreams in Total Darkness" during some stoned sessions at Matt's house. For the first time, the ensemble even tried some full-band writing sessions, though "Day I Die" was the only keeper.

In April of 2016, the twins celebrated their 40th birthday and, the next day, recording officially commenced at Aaron's new studio. The proceedings were intentionally loose, and the band members spent a lot of their downtime just reconnecting and relaxing by an adjacent pond. "It was like summer camp," admits Bryan. "But we actually made the record somehow—I'm not sure how it happened. There were intense, disciplined periods and some free-floating elements."

"We didn't feel any pressure," Aaron says. "That was healthy because there was a lot of learning and growing going on. And at some point, when I decided to build the studio, there started to be a little bit more of a timeframe."

The members of The National have long busied themselves with a variety of side-projects and parallel endeavors but, more than ever, the quintet started to feel like a collective. Matt formed the electro-indie outfit EL VY; Bryan and Scott devoted their attention to their improv-rooted group LNZNDRF; Bryce, who is classically trained, composed a variety of new pieces, dipped his toes into writing for the ballet world and then participated in the space-age *Planetarium* project along with Sufjan Stevens, Nico Muhly and James McAlister; and Aaron continued to make his name as an in-demand producer for indie acts like Frightened Rabbit, The Lone Bellow and Local Natives.

"We were giving ourselves more time and better conditions," Bryce adds. "We weren't planning to make a record, and Matt was in a different headspace with EL VY, but we quickly realized that this was going a little better than usual. The music we were making started to gather momentum and then eventually [Matt] got interested in it, and started singing over things."

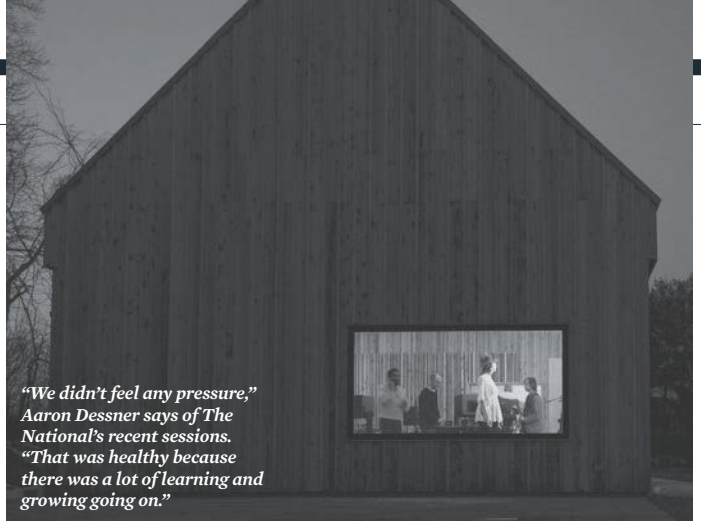
In addition to various festival curations, studio collaborations and a film score with his brother, Aaron devoted much of his time to crafting the nearly

six-hour indie-jam Grateful Dead tribute, *Day of the Dead,* which featured hefty contributions from Bryce and the Devendorfs, as well as The National proper on a few tracks. Then, Aaron, Scott and Bryan spent time on the road with Bob Weir as part of his Campfire Tour.

Though *Sleep Well Beast* strays from extended jams—and the album's guitar solos are more angular Ira Kaplan (of Yo La Tengo) than journeyman Jerry Garcia—the band's deep-dive into the Dead's catalog left an indelible mark on how The National approached their recording process and the resulting music. "The songs were a bit more open-ended. We created a lot of space for more possibilities and experimentation, as opposed to tightly organizing everything around what Matt was going to do, as far as trying to create the perfect song," Aaron says. "It was more about creating these experiences. We designed the studio to be open and collaborative, where everyone could be set up in their own zone, fully plugged-in and experiment for eight hours thinking, 'We'll sort through it later.'"

For most of their rise, The National's painstaking creative process involved Aaron crafting instrumental passages, often with Bryce, which Matt would write lyrics to. The tension between their varied approaches and the group's overall multilevel family dynamic had a huge impact on the band's sound. But, the free-form *Sleep Well Beast* sessions allowed the Dessners to reconsider just what constitutes a National song and to reach out to their extended network of friends like Justin Vernon, Josh Kaufman, Thomas Bartlett and Lisa Hannigan in order to flesh out their thoughts.

Some songs stemmed from ideas the Dessners had earmarked from other projects: The album's title track was actually written as a piece for sisters Marielle and Katia Labèque, two pianists from Europe, before they reworked it for the band.



"We didn't feel any pressure," Aaron Dessner says of The National's recent sessions. "That was healthy because there was a lot of learning and growing going on."

"It's fun to not put too much pressure on what is a National song and what is not a National song," Aaron says, before Bryce chimes in with a bit of his trademark sibling telepathy. "People ask us, 'How do you do so many different things?' And we don't understand what other people do because the way we keep it interesting is by constantly learning. With Mouse on Mars, when we were over in Berlin, that was a whole new relationship with this record. We're constantly collecting ideas that become part of the bigger musical landscape of what a National record can be."

The album's invocation, "Nobody Else Will Be There," ushers in the band's new, calm era when Matt croons, "It's getting cold again but New York's gorgeous/ It's a subway day." It's a short stanza in the midst of a very National account of a packed party and evening-length goodbyes set over some cinematic piano and a sparse, consistent beat, but it perfectly captures the album's seasonal mood—the rare New York moment between the increasingly brutal summer and winter months, when the city seems to stand still and exist in the now while welcoming in the next season.

It's another approach they learned while working on *Day of the Dead.* "You can hear it; there's air," Aaron adds. "The conversation in the music is audible. As opposed to, in the past, where it's been heavily layered in this beautiful, quilting, thick way. There are whole stretches of songs that have no guitar on this record. But there's a greater sense of architecture in the music, which I think is something we've been trying to do for years."

Scott has another explanation for the new approach: "Bryce was like, 'I don't want to play guitar anymore' and, honestly, there was burnout," he says of the band's decision to bring in new computerized effects and to rely more heavily on keyboards, pianos, drum loops and enveloping string instruments. "Walk It Back" has a steady Krautrock-groove while the kaleidoscopic, New Wave hymn "I'll Still Destroy You" is the rare National tune that contains some glitch.

In fact, the LP is loaded with fresh, post-indie-rock sounds. Aaron and Bryce note that they designed the guitar parts on "Guilty Party" to chirp like harps.

However, when the Dessners do plug in, they shred more than ever. On previous records, The National have largely avoided the extended guitar solos and classic-rock licks that defined their youth playing Dead and Allman Brothers tunes, but they channeled their inner Nels Cline on "Turtleneck," as well as the breakdown of "The System Only Dreams in Total Darkness." Matt—the only member of the band who didn't go through a jamband phase growing up—even boasts that, at one point, he "directed" the Dessners' dueling guitar solos. While working on *Sleep Well Beast,* the Dessners made time to record a slew of guitar solos as an exercise. "Nothing from that period survived or made it to this record, but I think it's all strong," Aaron says. "And we realized that we were just enjoying hearing an individual character. We had names for things, like 'Razor Lemon,' because of the guitar Bryce was playing and the way he was playing. It opened this door; it was like a fresh wind that was blowing all of a sudden."

Aaron considers "Sleep Well Beast" the track most indebted to his time at Dead camp and can see it morphing on tour under those hot stage lights. "It has an incredibly simple, repetitive figure on piano," he notes. "It's open; you could play it many ways. The solo was just impulsively done in the studio one day while having a beer, but when we perform the song, it might sound very different each time. There's a lot of freedom to it. And everyone got to experiment on that song. We used these French musicians—Bryce orchestrated across the top and Bryan played all this percussion."

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DURING THEIR FORMATIVE years, the lanky Matt was known as one of indie-rock's most anxious frontmen, often calming his nerves by crouching over onstage and chugging wine. But success has allowed him to relax and even enjoy performing live. (His decision to use a teleprompter has helped, too.) "It was having a kid—that puts things into perspective," he says. "It made us respect the band, meaning like, 'Holy, shit. We all have families and we all can keep the lights on and put our kids through school, so we can't fuck this up.' But also, if it did get fucked up, who cares? Because that's rock-and-roll."

"The Dead are able to make difficult, complex music that doesn't sound difficult," Scott adds. "The exercise of learning their music was good for us because, in certain ways, our music is simpler than the Dead's. There isn't that turnaround."

"Nothing lasts, and everything is forgotten," Bryan adds with a sense of Zen-like

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SPIRITED AWAY

John McLaughlin and Jimmy Herring join forces for McLaughlin's final U.S. tour.

By **DEAN BUDNICK**

WHEN MILES DAVIS offers career advice, it's best to heed his words.

This was the conclusion that guitarist John McLaughlin reached in 1971 when Davis suggested that the time was right for him to go off and explore his instincts and vision as a songwriter and bandleader. The British guitarist had arrived in America a couple of years earlier to join the Tony Williams Lifetime, recording two pioneering fusion albums with the drummer, a veteran of Davis' Second Great Quintet. This led to McLaughlin's own stint with Davis, which included classic releases such as *In a Silent Way*, *Bitches Brew* (which features a track titled "John McLaughlin"), *A Tribute to Jack Johnson* and *Live-Evil*.

The project that McLaughlin formulated drew on all of his musical antecedents, while remaining forward-thinking. The Mahavishnu Orchestra propelled fusion into new realms, with complexity, energy and danger (long before the descriptor became associated with lite jazz). McLaughlin enlisted drummer Billy Cobham, keyboard player Jan Hammer, violinist Jerry Goodman and bass player Rick Laird to record the startling and revelatory *The Inner Mounting Flame*. This was the first of five studio albums that McLaughlin would release with Mahavishnu through 1975, with the guitarist as the lone mainstay.

Starting in November in Buffalo, N.Y., McLaughlin will revisit this material for what is billed as his final U.S. tour. "The Meeting of the Spirits" will team McLaughlin with Jimmy Herring, a Mahavishnu fan since his teenage years. Back in 2012, Herring recorded a version of "Hope," which originally appeared on the Mahavishnu Orchestra's second album, *Birds of Fire* for the Widespread Panic/Aquarium Rescue Unit guitarist's own *Subject to Change Without Notice*. The two musicians were soon introduced and began a friendship that reflects their common enthusiasm and character.

The "Meeting of the Spirits" tour—which is named after the opening track on *The Inner Mounting Flame*—will feature sets by Herring's latest project The Invisible Whip and McLaughlin's own 4th Dimension before the two groups take the stage together for a final set in which they will explore the Mahavishnu catalog. McLaughlin envisions these dates as a thank you to the American audiences who first embraced the group back in 1971.

When McLaughlin and Herring make time for a phone call in the weeks leading up to the tour, Herring has just wrapped up a series of gigs with his band, while McLaughlin has started sharing some of music that he hopes to delve into when these spirits finally meet again.

As the call begins, McLaughlin acknowledges the challenging nature of the material: "We're all doing a little shedding getting ready for the tour. A lot of that music from the early '70s is not exactly the easiest music to play. When I'm looking at it, I'm thinking 'What was I on when I made that?' But I was on nothing at all when I made that crazy music."

Herring responds with a laugh, "It's just so amazing to hear you say that, to hear you say, 'Oh man, I made some pretty hard music back in those days.'"

When I heard that you were doing this, the first thing that jumped into my head was the tour that Mahavishnu did with Jeff Beck in 1975. I'm curious if you see this as analogous to that in any way?

JOHN: Of course, there are some analogies. I love Jeff. He's been very good to me—and what a wonderful guitar player. The idea of the structure of what Jimmy and I will do stems directly from that experience. Because with Jeff, every night we each had a set and then we had a big jam at the end with both bands: two drummers, two bass players, two keyboard players and two guitar players. And there's something nice about that, but you need the special spirit in there. It can only work with certain people who are tuned into that vibe, like Jeff. God bless him because he's still playing so great, even today.

And I feel the same way about having the opportunity now to do this with Jimmy. I'm so impressed and grateful that both Jimmy and Jeff have looked to Mahavishnu and done versions of some of those tunes that I would give my back teeth to be a part of. The first time I heard Jimmy play, I think it was a version of the tune "Hope" from 1972–73. I heard it and was like, "Why didn't I play it like that?" It was wonderful, just wonderful. And Jeff, over the years, has also taken some of those old tunes and put his mark on them.

Pepe Gomes

I saw Jeff recently in the audience when we recorded *Live @ Ronnie Scott's* [McLaughlin's latest release with his band the 4th Dimension]. He's such a sweetheart. Whenever I play, he comes to see me. But that whole idea of the jam was such a great experience. Having played with Jimmy, and having known his playing for years now, that we're going to have a lot of fun. We're suffering right now, but I know we're gonna have fun.

Jimmy, you recorded "Hope" for *Subject to Change Without Notice*. Talking to you around the time it came out, I remember you mentioned that one of your older brothers first turned you on to Mahavishnu. Can you talk a little about that?

JIMMY: Oh yeah. He had *The Inner Mounting Flame*, *Birds of Fire* and some Miles Davis records. And that was my first exposure to hearing instrumental music. I was a teenager, and some of my friends and I were playing tunes with vocals that nobody could sing. I went into the music of that time for my generation. There was Led Zeppelin and Aerosmith and stuff like that and when I heard Mahavishnu Orchestra, it was like a lightbulb went on. I'd never heard musicianship like that, and it was an immediate change with what I wanted to do with my life. I knew immediately.

I didn't even try to play any of the music until maybe two years later, but I just listened to it all the time. Then, with some of the riffs, I might start to think, "That's an open string there. Wow, that's supposed to be an E." None of those riffs are easy, but I started to find my way towards some of them. And then I went into the rabbit hole. That changed my life.

After hearing *The Inner Mounting Flame* and *Birds of Fire*, that led me down a path, asking, "What else did John listen to?" So I found Coltrane, I found Miles Davis. My brother had some of those too, and he was pushing me towards that music because we could never find anybody to sing. It's weird how it happens. And I've been in that rabbit hole ever since. Even though I've done a lot of different things, that music is what really drives me to work.

JOHN: Well, I'm with you all the way, Jimmy. After all these years, I'm still in the rabbit hole! Still shedding after all these years.

JIMMY: That's what's so inspiring. To hear John say that, I mean he's forgotten more than most people ever know.

JOHN: Jimmy, don't forget that I did little things prior to being invited to New York. It was two years with Tony Williams. And at the same time, through all those things with Miles, who was my all-time hero since I was 15 years old. How lucky can you get? We're all on the same boat, eventually. It's just a different time. I got so much inspiration from these people, that kind of encouragement.

With Miles, it was the end of 1970. I was just sitting in a little club in the band room, and it's just me and Miles. We just finished the gig, and he turns to me and says [in a raspy, Miles Davis voice], "It's time to form your own band." Just out of the blue like a lightning bolt. I thought, "How can I refuse this guy? I gotta do it just to justify it." That was the impetus for starting Mahavishnu. But I couldn't have done it without someone like Miles saying, "Go ahead and do it. You gotta do it."

So I've got gigantic debts

and it's very sweet; I feel humbled by Jimmy's statement that he's getting a similar thing from me. But, in a sense, I feel that my life's fulfilled. If you can just give a little inspiration to somebody in your life, then you pass on the spirit. So I feel fortunate.

JIMMY: Well, you've had that effect on millions of people, man. It's so heavy and it goes back so far. It's not just one period of your career, either. It's the whole thing. And it's everything you did before, after and during the Miles period and all the other things.

JOHN: When I heard Trane for the first time, I was 15. I was already a fan of Miles but when I heard Trane, I thought, "What is he doing?!" And then in 1964, *A Love Supreme* comes out. He didn't play guitar, but what a man and what an inspiration. Miles brought him to the world, really. He's just carrying on the story of the spirit. Talk about inspiration and encouragement—it took me a year of listening to *A Love Supreme* every day before I could finally hear what he was doing. But at the same time, I knew that there was something magical and beautiful. You just have to read the poem on the back of the album. I knew the music corresponded to the beautiful poem, prayer, whatever you want to call it. I think about my young twenties and how frustrated I was looking for my way. Even just finding your way in life is hard. To find your way in music, I needed all of these people and, without them, I would have died, I think. I would have died musically, that's for sure. I'm just carrying the banner, that's all. Jimmy's picked it up and he's carrying the banner because this is really my last tour. I'm not able to accept tours anymore. I'm hoping to take gigs from time to time, but I'm nervous about taking tours in case I have a bad-hair day and drop everybody in the doo-doo. It would be catastrophic for me. So, Jimmy, it's all on you!

JIMMY: I've been having bad-hair days every day lately.

JOHN: We all have bad-hair days. I had one the day before yesterday, and it was terrible.

Jimmy, in talking to you over the years, I know that you're someone who puts a lot of pressure on yourself to deliver the music in a way that feels right to you, so you put in a lot of practice time. Can you talk about working on the songs for this collaborative set?

JIMMY: I put pressure on myself, but I never feel forced to practice. I just wanna play when I wanna play. So I'll come down off a tour and I listen to this music. I listened to it for so many years, and I'm having a full-circle moment with this music because it goes back to when my brother played it for me for the first time. And now, when I look back, one of the most important things I learned from the music was the honesty it had. I want to hear the person, hear their spirit and not just be listening to notes. I hope that comes with me through whatever period I'm going through with music, whether it's a rock band or a jazz-fusion band, or anything I might do.

It's so much fun to just dive back into it again. Although, I put a lot of pressure on myself, as I think any musician does because there are expectations. That drives me to work harder and try to prepare. But this is music that I would be listening to even if I wasn't playing it with John.

JOHN: Jimmy has dedicated his life to his instrument and to music, and it's not really like work. Because, same with me, there's a certain sense of responsibility when you go on stage—people pay their hard-earned money to sit in front of you and they want you to be on top of it. They want to feel that spirit and they don't want to be concerned with your problems. They're not interested in hearing you say, "Sorry, I couldn't make that articulation." They want to hear you hit it. And so we work. But it's not work because after all these years—I've been playing guitar for 60-something years—I play every day not because I need to, but because I just love to play.

And to add a little to what Jimmy said about the full circle, this is really what the tour is for me. We're going back 45–46 years, since the first Mahavishnu album. It came out after this wonderful experience with Tony and continued with Miles. But when Mahavishnu came out, I did not expect this music to be accepted in the manner that it was by the listening public, the American public. The most surprised person of all was me. And so because this is my last tour—it has to be in America. I wanna play Mahavishnu music because it's my thank you to the American listeners who embraced Mahavishnu before everybody else. And it's a very personal thing.

It's full circle for me because, I'm coming back and saying goodbye, and I want to say goodbye with the music that exploded with me in the middle of 1971. If that isn't full circle, then I don't know what is. I'm just thrilled that Jimmy's going to be a part of it.

JIMMY: And it means the same to me, absolutely. It means so much to us because you brought the world so much great music, John, and you've done it in so many different ways and in so many different forms.

JOHN: That's very sweet, Jimmy. But the thing is, I'm still a total student. I learned something this morning already on the guitar that I've never done before.

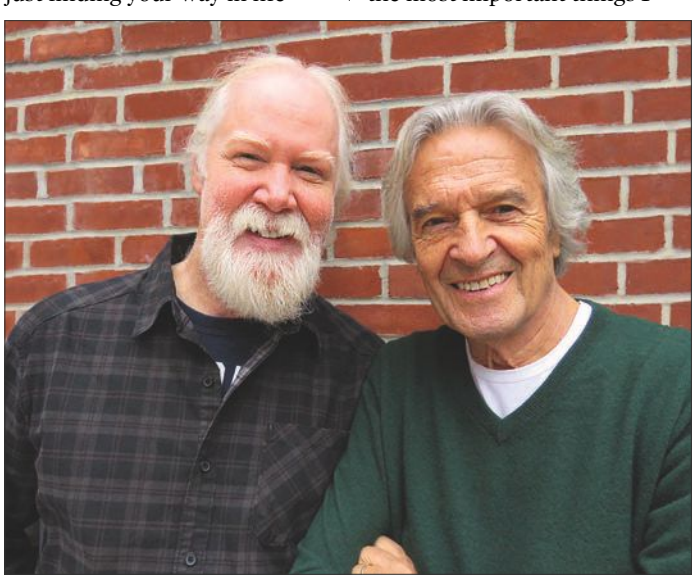
JIMMY: That is so inspiring.

JOHN: Can you ever get to the end? I mean, who can get to the end? You get to the end of life, you keel over and that's it. But until then, every day is a new day and, every day, we learn something.

John, you mention that the reaction to *The Inner Mounting Flame* surprised you. Even to those people who were familiar with what you were doing prior to that point, it had to be quite striking. Can you talk about the journey that led you to write and record that music?

JOHN: I spent the entire '60s in the U.K., pretending to be a jazz musician but, most of the time, I was playing R&B and funk. I was playing it not just to survive—I was playing it because I love it. If you take the R&B out of jazz, you don't have any jazz left. You certainly don't have any blood and guts left. It's just kind of tra-la-la. And from The Beatles on, I was a rock-and-roll fan. And then, of course, there's people like Stevie Wonder. And I also got to play with the Four Tops in the U.K.

So after all of this R&B stuff and the rock experiences of the '60s, I arrived in New York and Miles wanted a guitar player. I didn't come to join Miles; I came to New York to join The Tony Williams Lifetime with Larry Young. That was just



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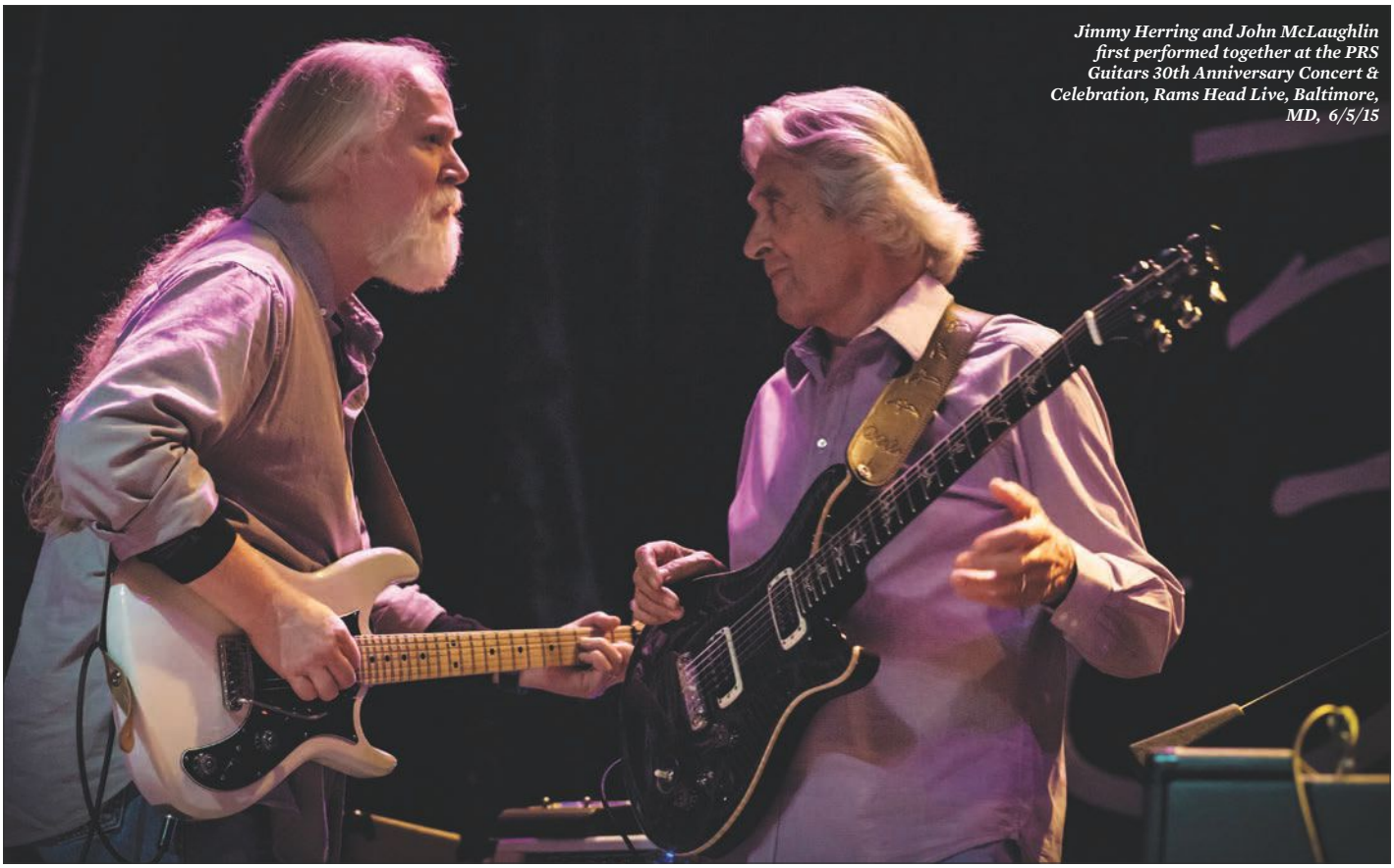

Jimmy Herring and John McLaughlin first performed together at the PRS Guitars 30th Anniversary Concert & Celebration, Rams Head Live, Baltimore, MD, 6/5/15

Pepe Gomes

such a thrill because I've been listening to Tony since 1965 and he was *it* for me.

But Miles kept inviting me to his house after recording *In a Silent Way*. He'd say [imitating Miles Davis], "Bring your guitar" and I'd go there once or twice a week. He would pick my brain and say, "What do you hear if I play this chord?" I'd say, "It could make a nice riff, Miles," and he'd say, "Play it." He was pushing me and, at the same time, I was playing with Tony.

I have two totally different relationships, musically, with Tony and Miles. Miles wanted all the R&B and funk stuff that I'd been doing in the '60s. The thing is, I'd been listening to everything from Monk to Mingus to Trane and Miles during the '60s period. And The Beatles, of course. And Sly & the Family Stone and a whole gamut of what was going on in the '60s, which was a real musical explosion.

With Tony, we were a radical band. You can hear it on *Emergency!* or *Turn It Over*. We're talking about early '69, where anything would go. When we'd be playing music, Tony would start singing a Brazilian song, and I'd start reciting poetry at the same time because we were looking for new ways. And after a while, Tony started to see the music that I was writing and he encouraged me from that point: "John, write as much music as you can and we'll play it." So I can say, quite categorically, that a lot of the Mahavishnu music that came out later with the Orchestra, the foundations were done with Lifetime and Tony because of all that encouragement and the opportunity to be able to do that live with someone like Tony Williams and Larry Young who was, to me, one of the greatest of all Hammond organ players.

So after all that experience, you can see how I would come up with some crazy stuff. Monk was a big influence on me. Mingus was a big influence on me. And you listen to their records—the whole arpeggio thing, I actually got that between Monk and George Harrison. How about that for a combination? Is that weird or what?

So I had an agent and I said, "I'm gonna put a band together." I really believed in this band and, in fact, that's how I signed with CBS. I had done two records with Alan Douglas' Douglas Records and, one day, Nat Weiss, who was my manager, said, "We're gonna go see Clive Davis." I said, "Clive Davis—CBS? Wow, fantastic." So we went to see him, and we're in Clive's office, and he knew me only from what I'd been doing with Miles. He said, "So, John, Nat told me you're putting a band together. You wanna tell me about it?" I said, "Well, it's really hard to explain what it's gonna be. But I can tell you the band will be amazing, Clive. Amazing." And he said, "John, you know, I like the way you talk. Let's sign!" The record industry was exploding and Clive was one of the greatest record men. He heard the enthusiasm that I had in my voice, and he was just ready to take a risk on it. [In his autobiography, *The Soundtrack of My Life*, Davis characterizes this as one of his

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"You get to the end of life, you keel over and that's it. But until then, every day is a new day and, every day, we learn something."
JOHN MCLAUGHLIN

REVIEWS

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

LCD Soundsystem

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

American Dream COLUMBIA/DFA

LCD Soundsystem called it quits in early 2011, celebrating the band's finale with a farewell concert at Madison Square Garden. That show, later released as a live album and concert film, felt like the pinnacle of the New York group's three-album career. It was a spectacle beyond spectacles, and left most fans feeling as though they'd gotten a memorable goodbye. But endings are never final in the music industry, especially when festivals start calling with well-paying headlining spots, and LCD Soundsystem released a reunion single at the end of 2015. And what's the point of a public breakup if you're only going to get back together a few years later? The point, it turns out, is *American Dream*, the band's fourth album. The 10 tracks feel both like a return to form and an evolution, revealing a more thoughtful frontman in **James Murphy** than existed six years ago. Maybe it's the state of the world or maybe it's Murphy's time away from the band that's caused the reflection, but *American Dream* offers a notable pensiveness and concern. The song "Other Voices" has the raw, rhythmic tones of "Dance Yrself Clean," while the title track invokes a lush, ambient soundscape to back Murphy's mournful croon. It's clear in listening to these songs that Murphy continues to lean on the pessimistic side of the mental spectrum. Mostly basic and straightforward, the lyrics are filled with downer sentiments, particularly in the hypnotic, nine-minute number "how do you sleep?" which could be about the singer's former partner and co-founder of DFA Records, Tim Goldsworthy. On the song, Murphy muses, "Standing on the shore, getting off/ You left me here amid the vape clowns/ I must admit I missed the mountain/ But not so much you." Murphy hasn't lost his interest in these sorts of long, repetitive songs, many of which center on only a few sparse electronic beats. The album closes with "Black Screen," a track that slowly unfurls 12 minutes of hushed, pensive melody. The number continues well past its logical ending point, transitioning from synth-laden crooning to a haunting echo of a piano line. It's a solid metaphor for LCD Soundsystem, a band that's found a life, long after it seemed like they were finished.

Emily Zemler

Robert Plant

Carry Fire NONESUCH

Robert Plant has become somewhat of an outlier among his classic-rock peers. He won't reunite Led Zeppelin. He's not interested in finding new ways to record different versions of "Stairway to Heaven." And more so, he's up for getting a bit weird–evident on his 2014 release *Iullaby and...the Ceaseless Roar*, and his latest album *Carry Fire*, his 11th solo effort to date. *Carry Fire* is the second album he's recorded with his latest band, **The Sensational Space Shifters,** and it's an excellent step ahead from where they were with *Iullaby*. Throughout *Carry Fire*, Plant's distinct high-pitched vocals intermix with ethereal, spacey arrangements that give off a spooky vibe at times, as on the piano-driven "A Way With Words" and the glitchy "Keep It Hid." There's hints of his rock-and-roll past, like on the album's standout track "Season's Song" and the bluesy-folk opener "The May Queen." Lyrically, Plant ruminates on lost loves and romance, while at other moments, he seems to be commenting on the state of the universe. On one of the more upbeat rock numbers "New World," he reflects on colonialism, as he sings of the white man educating the "noble savage." And in a rather direct comment on today's topsy-turvy world, Plant sings of border-wall blues in the pounding "Carving Up the World Again...A Wall and Not a Fence." The lone cover song comes toward the end, a version of Ersel Hickey's 1957 song "Bluebirds Over the Mountain"–Plant is joined by Pretenders' vocalist **Chrissie Hynde** for a duet that features both of their voices singing in unison, with a driving drum beat, some fiddles and atmospheric sounds all blending together. Of course, with Plant, there will always be echoes of his past work lingering around anything he does. But he wants to keep moving forward, and *Carry Fire* makes the case that he should do so for the foreseeable future. ***Mike Ayers***

Hiss Golden Messenger

Hallelujah Anyhow MERGE

Ever since reemerging as **Hiss Golden Messenger**'s mouthpiece in 2007, **M.C. Taylor** has been one of indie-folk's most approachable artists. In his reedy everyman tenor, the North Carolinian recounts relatable tales of spiritual pain, family contentment and existential angst. Based on the intimacy of his live shows and the frankness of his interviews, you get the sense he couldn't bullshit you if he tried. His prolificacy (seven albums and two EPs in nine years) feels appropriate: Taylor isn't churning out material to ride out his recent hype wave; he approaches music like hard labor, breaking a sweat to refine his craft. On 2016's *Heart Like a Levee*, the Hiss mastermind flexed all his muscles at once, moving seamlessly from Stax-styled soul to back-porch Americana to swampy psych-rock. After that jack-of-all-trades display, *Hallelujah Anyhow* feels like a return to his rootsy roots–a soothing balm of folk-rock strumming, pedal-steel moan, and gospel harmonies. Taylor and his ramshackle studio crew cut these 10 songs quickly, with minimal overdubs, in an effort to replicate the immediacy of their live show. And that no-frills approach is the ideal vehicle for the softly crooned ballad "Jaw" and soul-rock strut of "Domino (Time Will Tell)," on which he reflects on early tours filled with "old SGs and cigarette smoke." On the rare occasion, Taylor allows himself to indulge, piling counterpoint saxophone on "I Am the Song" and atmospheric keys into the psychedelic climax of "John the Gun." But he never forgets his most crucial instrument. "While I'm here, I'm gonna sing just like a songbird," he croons on "When the Wall Comes Down." And for that, we're thankful. ***Ryan Reed***

Mads Perch

Robert Plant

Mike Gordon

OGOGO MEGAPLUM/ATO

What do you want in a Phish side project? Something different or something that exists in the band's world? Over the years, **Mike Gordon** has straddled those lines fairly well, and on his fifth studio album *OGOGO*, balance, in the literal sense, is key. The album's groovy opener "Equilibrium" kicks things off with that notion, where Gordon simply ponders being off-kilter and a desire to live in that state of physical balance. On the bouncy "Steps," he sings about someone going against the grain, asking "how do you walk down steps when everyone else is going up?" And on the driving, ethereal arrangement of "Pendulum," Gordon seems to be apologizing, as he sings, "Thank you for not judging what I did/ and keeping me from going beyond." Phish fans will also recognize two *OGOGO* songs that found their way into the band's summer 2017 tour–"Crazy Sometimes," an uptempo, scattered sounding number, and the reggae-tinged "Marissa." They both could easily be welcomed into the band's rotation. But probably the biggest thing you'll notice when listening to *OGOGO* is that the music sounds much more rooted in indie-rock, say, in the vein of the bass-heavy, angular world of Spoon. Gordon teamed up with producer **Shawn Everett**, known for his work with Weezer and The Strokes' Julian Casablancas, resulting in punchy, short numbers, with many clocking in at just over two or three minutes. Compact suits him well, too. Gordon's always been a shapeshifter, so this shouldn't be too a big of a surprise. ***Mike Ayers***

Matisyahu

Undercurrent

FALLEN SPARKS/THIRTY TIGERS

Matisyahu has long since left behind the Orthodox Jewish image for which he became known during his rise to fame a decade ago, and his musical output has certainly evolved along with his outward appearance. His most recent offering, *Undercurrent*, follows up 2014's *Akeda* and stays true to that album's sweeping, synth-driven textures, but with an approach that's more open to experimentation. When speaking of the album's creation, Matisyahu discusses his excitement over it being the first one produced by himself and his band (longtime collaborator and guitarist **Aaron Dugan**, Dub trio bassist **Stu Brooks**, Dub Trio drummer **Joe Tomino** and keyboardist **"Big Yuki" Hirano**), along with his intentional focus on improvisation as a band leader. The vocalist describes *Undercurrent*'s eight tracks as "journeys into different lands and different cavernous sound landscapes," in which he aims to be a "narrator on a journey, figuring out where I can dip in and help develop and build." His goals come to fruition on the record, with each track given its own space to develop and coalesce–only one clocks in at (barely) under six minutes. Opening number "Step Out into the Light" provides a clear, steady beat for Matis' spoken-word verses that burst into soaring choruses. "Coming Up Empty" nods to the musician's early reggae influences, while final track "Driftin'" shows how far he's come with a nearly 14-minute exploration that features an extended jam between Dugan's guitar and Matisyahu's well-honed beatboxing.
Matt Inman

Turnpike Troubadours

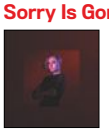
A Long Way From Your Heart

BOSSIER CITY

Oklahoma-based sextet **Turnpike Troubadours** are an underrated double threat these days: They put on a killer live show and make polished-sounding studio records. Led by principal Troubadour **Evan Felker**, the group has excelled over the years at writing personal portraits of small-town life, where blue-collar values mingle with blue-collar beer choices on a daily basis. The struggle is real and it's full of joy. That line of thinking hasn't changed too much on their fourth album, *A Long Way From Your Heart*. The album kicks off with the rustic mid-tempo number "The Housefire," a story, about an unexpected tragedy, where time is of the essence. It sets the tone for the next 10 songs, where Felker digs deep into the outlaw life on the desert-rock-tinged "Pipe Bomb Dream," and sings an ode to his bar-owning aunt and gambling on the poignant ballad "Pay No Rent." And on album standout "A Tornado Warning," a story about a pending storm mixes with urgent guitar solos to create a sense of doom on the horizon, Felker bellows that he's "waiting for the sky to fall." Like Jason Isbell, Drive-By Truckers and older alt-country acts such as Whiskeytown and Son Volt, Turnpike Troubadours are grinders, quietly making albums you'll want to spin from start to finish, without fearing that you'll get bored. *A Long Way From Your Heart* continues down that path. But perhaps the band's real motto is hidden within "The Winding Stair Mountain Blues"–"the devil's in the fine detail." ***Mike Ayers***

Jessica Lea Mayfield

Sorry Is Gone ATO



When a chance to say screw it and move forward without fearing any repercussions comes along, it's often hard to know what to do with it. 28-year-old **Jessica Lea Mayfield** has captured one of those moments on her fourth album *Sorry Is Gone*, a record she wrote after separating from her spouse and wanting to take her life back. It's musical therapy with a supporting cast of all-stars around her, including Sonic Youth drummer **Steve Shelley**, her Elliott Smith-tribute partner **Seth Avett** and producer **John Agnello** (Kurt Vile, Dinosaur Jr.). Throughout her 10-plus year career, sharing feelings has never been an issue for Mayfield, but her records prior to this never had anything so compact, so searing and, at times, so angry. Knowing where those emotions were born from, it's understandable. But along with a very clear lyrical path, Mayfield's music here is also the most direct of her career. Her arrangements still have an underlying bluesy element, but there's a heavy dose of fuzzed-out guitars at certain times and, at others, a Mazzy Star element. Listening to all 11 songs on *Sorry Is Gone* straight though may make you feel like an outsider eavesdropping on uncomfortable conversations set to music, but being this direct and fired

up suits Mayfield well. ***Mike Ayers***

Lucinda Williams
This Sweet Old World
HIGHWAY 20/THIRTY TIGERS

While artists performing classic albums from their back catalogs has been a concert staple this century, the notion of rerecording an entire record from one's past with new arrangements isn't really a practice that many embark on. But **Lucinda Williams** has never been an artist that follows any sort of rule book, and, for her fourth album this decade, she's looking back at her 1992 release *Sweet Old World* with a new sound and 25 years of experience in tow. If you compare the two side-by-side, then the first thing you'll notice is that Williams' early days were more steeped in a country-pop approach. And there's nothing wrong with that; she was hustling a certain way back then. On *This Sweet Old World*, her voice is noticeably raw and weathered; songs like the title track and "Sidewalks of the City" feel more dire now, whereas before they might have lacked a certain immediacy. In the past several years, Williams has really honed in on a primal blues sound, and these new versions continue down that path. As a bonus, she added four more songs from that era: "Factory Blues" and "Dark Side of Life" along with two covers, John Anderson's "Wild and Blue" and a John Leventhal/Jim Lauderdale penned number "What You Don't Know." ***Mike Ayers***

Matt Chamberlain and Brian Haas
Prometheus Risen
ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

Prometheus Risen is, quite simply, a collaboration between two friends, drummer **Matt Chamberlain** and keyboardist **Brian Haas**, who have circled each other in various jazz, jam and indie scenes for decades. In contrast to their 2013 meet up on *Frames*, which was fully thought-out and pre-composed by Haas, these 11 tracks showcase two masters of improvisation wholly on top of their game. Recorded live in a New Mexico studio, *Prometheus Risen* is an onslaught of soundscapes that range from melodic and flowing to dissonant and halting, all with an energy and power being palpably passed between the two parties. Chamberlain, who most recently toured with Soundgarden and has played with an impressive range of artists, imbues his robust rhythms throughout the record, underscoring Haas' exploratory piano and keyboard on tracks like "African Crowley" and "Cosmic Vision" with acoustic and electric drum beats and deft looping and effects work. Haas, co-founder of Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey, seems to have the time of his life playing both straight melodic lines and riffs like in "Orange Purple Sunshine"—which could serve as a single if an album like this really ever needed such a thing—and cascades of impressionistic piano that drive the multi-movement "Holding Deckard's Hand." Even further out on the limb are tunes like "Intelligence Intensification," which sees Chamberlain's pulsing rock beat topped by a fuzzy electronic wobble from Haas, just one of the many breathtaking textures achieved by this seemingly limitless pairing of musical minds. ***Matt Inman***

Godspeed You! Black Emperor
Luciferian Towers CONSTELLATION

More than possibly any other post-rock band on the planet, **Godspeed You! Black Emperor** realize the magic of a patient crescendo. Like their previous five LPs, *Luciferian Towers* is defined by the slow build, by tension and release—with stretches of static, dissonant drones disrupted by swaths of celestial melody. Like its predecessor, 2015's *Asunder, Sweet and Other Distress*, the album is more succinct than the band's seminal early work, structured around a pair of shapeshifting, nearly 15-minute long three-parters. "Bosses Hang" settles into a glacial swirl of guitars and violin, while "Anthem for No State" evolves from glimmering, fingerpicked guitars into a feedback-drenched noise-rock death march. The remaining two tracks function like elaborate interludes: the brass-backed "Undoing a Luciferian Towers" is an orchestral-scale drone that largely hovers on one chord, while bumble-bee guitars and suspended strings buzz throughout "Fam/Famine." The mighty Canadian octet—three guitarists, two drummers, two bassists and a violinist—augment their sound with snatches of organ, saxophone, and flute. But this is their muddiest recording in years, and it's hard to detect the depth of that nuance within their densest masses of sound. And that's the LP's lone drawback: Even as the arrangements ebb and flow majestically, particularly on the two centerpiece tracks, fewer individual moments emerge from the din. By Godspeed's lofty standards, *Luciferian Towers* is simply *another album*—no major surprises or tweaks to the grandiose recipe. But for these guys, business as usual is high fucking art. ***Ryan Reed***

Naughty Professor
Identity SELF-RELEASED

It's interesting that **Naughty Professor**'s album *Identity* is also the first one that finds the New Orleans collective reaching out to a plethora of collaborative artists, exploring new corners of their own identity while cementing the eclectic ethos that has helped the young outfit make a name for themselves in the musical gumbo that is the Crescent City. The band is proficient in everything from smooth jazz to modern hip-hop—with enough funk and soul thrown in to fill any NOLA venue well into the early morning hours. On *Identity*, Naughty Professor welcome guests on each track, enlisting vocalists who highlight the band's ability to craft a song and instrumentalists who blend seamlessly into the funky party that is this band. The velvety baritone of Jurassic 5's **Chali 2na** makes two appearances, first teaming up with **Ivan Neville** for the slinky "Sugarcoat" and, later, upping the tempo for some flawlessly rapped verses contrasted with choruses from New Orleans crooner **Dexter Gilmore** on "Darker Daze." The Revivalists' **David Shaw** stops by to lend his sultry vocals on "Stray," while jazz singer **Sasha Masakowski** helps the staccato "Through It All" lift off the ground and soar. Guitarist **Cliff Hines** lends his services to the tune too and also imparts spacey licks on "Psycho Switch," which provides the album with some experimental flair and even a bit of a proggy outro. The whole endeavor is rounded out with the appropriately titled "Funk 4 Lunch," which features several members of Naughty Professor's veteran brethren, **The Soul Rebels**, and takes the listener through multiple funk-filled rooms of sound. ***Matt Inman***

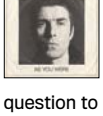
Lucinda Williams

David McClister

Deerhoof
Mountain Moves JOYFUL NOISE

We don't deserve **Deerhoof**. In the beginning, as with any new romance, we were smitten and told the world—glowing reviews serving like love letters. But now, after two decades of innovative vacations through avant-garde art-rock, noise-pop and twee punk, we've started to take them for granted—rarely a "best of" list or big-headline profile piece to show we care. In short, our once-fiery passion has settled into a comfortable marriage: Every year or two, they put out another album of rattling distortion, childlike hooks and lurching funk grooves, and we respond with yet another appreciative but lackluster pat on the back. With *Mountain Moves*, Deerhoof spiced up our relationship by recruiting some outside assistance. Argentinian songwriter **Juana Molina** forms a seductive, swirling vocal collage with bassist **Satomi Matsuzaki** on "Slow Motion Detonation." Rapper **Awkwafina** slides in for some comically silly outbursts on "Your Dystopic Creation Doesn't Fear You," which morphs gleefully from feathery soft-rock to metallic, razor-like riffs. The album's most surprising guest is Wye Oak frontwoman **Jenn Wasner**, who contrasts her robust croon with Matsuzaki's youthful coo on "I Will Spite Survive," a power-pop anthem that could be the most linear song in the band's catalog. *Mountain Moves* would have dazzled even without collaborators (or the handful of unexpected cover songs, including Matsuzaki's lo-fi take on Bob Marley's "Small Axe"), but you have to admire Deerhoof's determination to mix things up—reminding us of a greatness we fail to acknowledge often enough. ***Ryan Reed***

Liam Gallagher
As You Were WBR



Is **Liam Gallagher**'s music as interesting as everything that spews out of his mouth offstage? It's a hard question to answer, especially in light of his ongoing and very public feud with brother and former Oasis bandmate Noel. Still, it's fun to guess whether any of the tracks off his debut solo album, *As You Were*, are

targeted at Noel. Is rollicking thumper "Greedy Soul" a dig at Gallagher's estranged brother or is the singer simply annoyed at someone else in the industry? And it's curious who the mark might be on "You Better Run," a brash rock song in which Gallagher intones, "I'm gonna steal your thunder/ you better run/ you better hide." On "Bold," an acoustic guitar-led number that harkens back to Oasis, the musician knows who he is and he's not afraid to admit it, "Yes I know I've been bold," he sings, "I didn't do what I was told." As a whole, *As You Were* is a good album, both because Gallagher is a great songwriter and because he's willing to unleash these genuine sentiments. The album is well-crafted and carefully edited; each song contains the exact elements it needs. Gallagher is perpetually the star of his own music, as a real rock star should be, and he's made these songs lively with his mouthy, swaggering persona. He's also willing to be vulnerable when needed, like on "For What It's Worth," an emotionally wrought ballad on which Gallagher admits, "I've made my own mistakes." The album is at least as engaging as following him on Twitter, if not more so.

Emily Zemler

Cut Copy

Haiku From Zero ASTRALWERKS

Three minutes into **Cut Copy**'s new album, on opening track "Standing in the Middle of the Field," there is this distinct moment when the music opens up and embraces you. Whereas some electronic indie-rock can feel aloof or overly cool, Cut Copy has always been skilled at songs that are about collectiveness. The Australian group, led by singer/guitarist/keyboardist **Dan Whitford**, writes and performs music that is as much about the listener as it is about the band themselves. *Haiku From Zero* is their fifth full-length release, following 2013's deeply compelling *Free Your Mind*, and its beats and melodies are notably welcoming. From buoyant disco-infused rocker "Counting Down" to whirling pop track "Stars Last Me a Lifetime," *Haiku From Zero* employs a diversity of styles and sounds to create this feeling of community. The musicians infuse everything with a shimmering lightness, a sonic reminder that life might actually be OK. "Memories We Share" weaves African-inspired rhythms with vintage synth spirals, creating evocative layers that build on each other to a heaving pinnacle, as Whitford repeatedly croons, "I need you." The album, produced by **Ben Allen**, uplifts the listener and offers a real sense of hopefulness. There's no doubt that it will be impressive in a live setting, where these songs could attain even more circling energy onstage.

Emily Zemler

The Waterboys

Out of All This Blue BMG

Rotating members in and out, and switching locations throughout the years since their debut in 1983, **The Waterboys**' one constant has been Scottish singer-songwriter **Mike Scott**, whose renewed dedication to the group's output after the turn of the millennium has produced several releases reaching in various directions, leading up to his latest offering, the double album *Out of All This Blue*. Counting the bonus disc, the collection balloons to 34 tracks in all, which almost inherently serves up both pros and cons. While there are the inevitable cuts that perhaps should have been sacrificed to make a more succinct LP, the large scale of the record leaves room for Scott to dip his pen in several different inkwells, drawing from folk, country, rock and even hip-hop to create a generally feel-good offering that is well-informed by his marriage to sometimes controversial Japanese artist Megumi Igarashi, better known as Rokudenashiko. From the first-date storytelling of "Morning Came Too Soon" to the poppy "Payo Payo Chin" to a sweet ode that bears her pseudonym, *Out of All This Blue* is peppered with references to their relationship. Continuing his study in American country and Southern rock showcased in 2015's *Modern Blues*, Scott offers a couple of barroom-ready tunes in "The Connemara Fox" and its instrumental continuation "The Memphis Fox," along with a nod to his keyboardist **Brother Paul Brown** in "Nashville, Tennessee," while an intimate track like "The Girl in the Window Chair" proves, after all these years, Scott just needs his voice and an acoustic guitar to pull on some heart strings. ***Matt Inman***

Tegan and Sara

The Con X: Covers WARNER BROS

When done well, a cover song shouldn't sound exactly like the original. There should be hints of the past and a bit of reminiscing, but the best covers are those that reimagine a track in a new, telling way. That's generally the case on *The Con X: Covers*, a covers version of **Tegan and Sara**'s seminal album, *The Con*. The strongest moment comes from **Ryan Adams**, who tackles "Back in Your Head," infusing the song with a raw, punky vibe that lends itself to aching desperation. Paramore's **Hayley Williams** takes on heartbreaking "Nineteen," stripping it down and offering a vocal performance that makes you want to give her a hug, while **CHVRCHES** closes the disc with a meditative version of "Call It Off," lingering off the line: "Maybe you would have been something I'd be good at." Some of the songs sound almost unfamiliar, like **Mykki Blanco**'s rendition of "Knife Going In," which has a gritty, spoken-word vibe, and **Bleachers**' bare-bones version of "Burn Your Life Down." The commonality throughout the covers is an awareness of the melancholy and emotion of the original LP. *The Con* was about loss and heartbreak, and each cover here gets at that in some way—even if the ultimate emotional response feels somewhat different than Tegan and Sara's initial version. It's a deeply interesting concept, with many of the covers worth repeated listens, but in the end, these numbers just make you want to revisit *The Con* itself—10 years later, it's an album that continues to resonate. ***Emily Zemler***

Deer Tick

Deer Tick Vol. 1 & Vol. 2 PARTISAN

John McCauley is like Springsteen in a hipster flannel shirt or Petty on a punk kick. From the beginning, the **Deer Tick** singer-songwriter has functioned at the extremes of his personality—from the alt-country rumination of *Born on Flag Day* to the raucous, hard-partying garage-rock of *Divine Providence*. The band made a genuine breakthrough with 2013's *Negativity*, shelving their tales of drunken barroom antics in favor of primal breakup ache, fleshing out their arrangements with horns and harmonies. The band's sixth album, double-LP *Deer Tick Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2*, is split into two distinct halves—an "acoustic" first disc and amped-up second. But there's more to savor here than a basic rehash of their Jekyll and Hyde approaches: *Vol. 1 & 2* exhibit the broadest lyrical and stylistic range in their catalog, filling in the gaps between twang and distortion. On "Sea of Clouds," which opens the softer side LP, the band layers acoustic guitars with choral vocal harmonies and moaning, melodic bass; a highlight from the second disc is "Wants/Needs," which straddles the punk/power-pop border, as **Robert Crowell**'s clomping clavinet steers the track down a slightly funkier path. Six years ago, McCauley reached his creative low point by mining his fractured psyche on garage-rock throwaway "Let's All Go to the Bar." Here, he flips the sentiment on its head and ascends to a pinnacle with "Look How Clean I Am," a raggedly catchy garage-pop nugget, which makes a mockery out of sobriety showboating. The maturity—and clarity of purpose—is staggering. ***Ryan Reed***

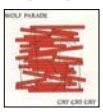
Tori Amos

Native Invader DECCA

Native Invader is **Tori Amos**' 15th album, a number that seems almost miraculous. It's especially impressive when you consider that Amos has consistently created sincere, evocative songs that waver between charmingly absurd and deeply affecting. This one features 13 tracks, opening with haunting seven-minute-long number "Reindeer King," which sets the mood and tension that follows. Amos was notably inspired by the 2016 election and has threaded ideas of protest and resistance throughout—although none of the songs here sound forceful or aggressive in tone. Instead, Amos, as usual, makes her point subtly and intelligently, using only her voice and the piano. "Climb" is a lovely ballad, containing a quiet power, while "Russia," one of the two bonus tracks on the deluxe edition, is more pointed with a terse dig at current political issues. There are less successful moments, like "Chocolate Song," which feels comparably shallow to the rest of the album, but overall, Amos delivers yet another precise, thoughtful collection of songs. Of course, at 54, the singer-songwriter no longer needs to prove herself. She's beyond established as one of the most impressive female vocalists out there, both recorded and live. Amos rarely sidesteps from her vision and her aesthetic, even as she evolves as a musician. *Native Invader*'s got a heart and a brain, and makes its points without ever pressing too hard or letting the issues overwhelm the music itself. ***Emily Zemler***

Wolf Parade

Cry Cry Cry SUB POP



From the beginning, **Wolf Parade** have defined the concept of "synergy." The band's two principal songwriters, **Spencer Krug** and **Dan Boeckner**, nudge each other into a distinctive prog-pop edge that's missing from their respective solo projects: Krug's Moonface endeavors lack the grandiosity of his top-tier Wolf Parade songs, and none of Boeckner's various outfits—including Handsome Furs and indie-rock supergroup Divine Fits—balance his gritty and arty sides with as much finesse. Seven years after their last LP, the frontmen sound ever-assured with that push-and-pull on *Cry Cry Cry*—Krug with his ornate, keyboard-dense epics ("Lazarus Online"), Boeckner with his sharp New Wave hooks ("You're Dreaming")—blending each other's primary colors into a more intriguing secondary hue. After that jolting one-two punch, the album slides into a wobbly second quarter with a stretch of plodding pieces (the piano-driven stomp of "Incantation," the static waltz-time ballad "Flies on the Sun"). But even Wolf Parade's B-level material feels unmistakably *them*: It's a joy to bask in "Baby Blue" if only to savor how Krug's croaky yelp pogos off of **Arlen Thompson**'s frenetic disco-rock drumming. And the record sprints to the finish line—from the synth-stacked, souped-up power-pop of "Who Are Ya" to power-ballad

curtain-call "King of Piss and Paper." *Cry Cry Cry* as a whole fails to clear the impossibly high bar set by their debut, 2005's *Apologies to the Queen Mary*. But as the highlights prove, Krug and Boeckner are capable of scaling those heights—together. *Ryan Reed*

The Killers

Wonderful Wonderful ISLAND

"Wonderful Wonderful," the title track of **The Killers**' latest effort, is notably unassuming, a meditative lure into a collection of 10 inventive, energetic songs. The album, produced by **Jacknife Lee**, is the band's fifth full-length and a long-awaited follow-up to 2012's *Battle Born*. Overall, it's less bashful than that opening number, with each song taking on its own unique aesthetic and tempo—something that is typical with The Killers, but not always quite so blatant. "Rut," an ambient, anthemic pop tune, lets frontman **Brandon Flowers** unleash an aching vocal melody infused with semi-hopeful emotion. "Don't give up on me," he wails, "'Cause I'm just in a rut," a notably poignant sentiment that carries over to the listener. On the pounding "Run for Cover," Flowers takes punches at a politician, who is presumably Donald Trump ("It's even harder when the dirt bag's famous"), while "The Calling" is a groovy, twanging rocker that unveils a countrified lyrical narrative. The album ends with a thoughtful, hushed number called "Have All the Songs Been Written," on which Flowers questions whether innovation is still possible. It's a valuable sentiment, particularly from a musician who dabbles in various genres and who is so interested in exploring the possibilities of a pop song. Of course, it's not really about songwriting at its heart. The track is really about a long-lost love. *Wonderful Wonderful* has some uneven moments, occasionally trying too hard to be innovative, but this closer is so lovely that you can forgive the band for the less genuine instances. "Have All the Songs Been Written" is one of those effective love songs that didn't exist before this album, which should answer its own question. *Emily Zemler*

John McLaughlin & the 4th Dimension

Live @ Ronnie Scott's

ABSTRACT LOGIX

By the end of 2017, **John McLaughlin** will have played what's billed as his final American tour, a couple dozen shows in tandem with fellow guitar slinger Jimmy Herring. McLaughlin will be accompanied on those shows, as he is on this nine-track set from Ronnie Scott's jazz club—a London institution for nearly six decades—by his **4th Dimension**, a quartet that's become, in recent years, McLaughlin's most reliably creative team since the Mahavishnu Orchestra in the '70s. If he has indeed given up the road for good, then, hopefully, he'll choose at least to return to this venue on occasion with this outfit—**Gary Husband** (keyboards), **Etienne M'bappé** (bass) and **Ranjit Barot** (drums)—to take it as far as it can go because they're on to something. The Mahavishnu name-drop isn't gratuitous: 4th Dimension comes closest among McLaughlin's regular bands of recent decades to re-exploring that world, sans some of its excesses, while bringing something undeniably new to the mix. On material drawn from those early recordings—"Meeting of the Spirits," "Miles Beyond" and "Vital Transformation"—the guitarist manages to approximate the experimentalism and pure combustibility of Mahavishnu while relying on his compatriots to update the concept. On "New Blues, Old Bruise," a song that McLaughlin cut with Chick Corea, drums, keys and guitar burst and recede in admirable lockstep, and "Sanctuary" often masquerades as a dirge, filling its spaces with the type of unworldly histrionics only this masterful player is capable of creating on the fly. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Wooten Chambers Franceschini

TRYPNOTYX VIX

It's almost absurd to use the simple descriptive "bassist" in conjunction with **Victor Wooten**. Like only a handful of musicians before him (among them is his bandmate Béla Fleck, who's virtually redefined the banjo), Wooten has taken a familiar instrument and demonstrated how much more there is to it than we'd imagined. It's a plus that Wooten is fearless too—if there's an opportunity to go someplace new, then he's on it, no questions asked. On *TRYPNOTYX*, Wooten is credited with drum programming and effects as well as his bass work, and his chosen co-conspirators—**Bob Franceschini** (tenor saxophone, flute and more) and **Dennis Chambers** (drums)—are right there with him, layering sounds atop sounds in pursuit of a wholly enveloping experience. Often, on tracks such as the title cut, "Cupid" and "The 13th Floor," the trio stretches what they've got on hand to the limit, creating an orchestral denseness. Other tracks, more minimal in nature—the self-explanatory "A Soul Full of Ballad" and the James Brown-esque "Funky D"—don't need to do any more than they set out to do: lay down grooves that never quit. Wooten and his mates are sculptors of a sort, gleefully going all funkadelic with the electronics, inventing impossible rhythms or just tossing around a playfully virtuosic lick or two. But never, ever, do they strut for the sake of strutting or thrill for the sake of thrilling—even at their most enterprising, at the core, is a ceaseless devotion to musicality and engagement. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Sky kings. A handful of the world's most mind-melting guitarists scamper cosmically through the music of a Nordic jazz-rock great on *Sky Music: A Tribute to Terje Rypdal* (Rune Grammofon). Elegant solo tracks by **Bill Frisell**, **David Torn** and **Nels Cline** (with cellist **Erik Friedlander**) are just the icing on the cake on an album that otherwise consists of explosive tunes from guitarists **Even Helte Hermansen**, **Hedvig Mollestad Thomassen**, **Raoul Björkenheim**, **Reine Fiske**, album producer **Henry Kaiser** and their tough rhythm section. **Terje Rypdal**, the now 70-year-old guitarist and composer, embodies the sort of virtuosity-plus-personality that inspired this heady gathering and, by the time the nine track album is over, you'll be itching to hear more by those involved.

Flying the flannel. Home doesn't get much downer than on country singer **Amber Cross**' *Savage on the Downhill* (Amber Cross). Cross, a Maine-bred backwoods hunter whose tough, flinty voice suggests a church lady gone wrong, compares a beastly romance to a wild boar in the title track. The keening "Lone Freighters Wail" suggests that Cross could be Michael Hurley's great folk-loner heir, while the love that barely abides amid economic "Storms of Scarcity" comes across like a Kelly Reichardt film. When not hunting wild boar, Cross rehabilitates formerly loved flannel shirts, embroidering them with her lyrics and selling them at shows instead of newly printed merch.

Whole sick crew. Sassy Chicago quartet **Dead Rider**'s *Crew Licks* (Drag City) is a vintage horror film of defibrillated rock. It's also something of an enigma, with a hint dropped in "Ramble on Rose," a subterranean avant-R&B Grateful Dead cover, that pays off in "WHEN i Was Frankenstein's," [sic] in which guitarist-bandleader **Todd Rittmann** plays a flesh-eating duet with himself. There's a Zappa-esque fondness for both dirty guitar tones—"(Title Redacted)" puts the "mental" in instrumental—and calmly frenetic percussion (dig the steel pan drums in "The Ideal"). But don't be afraid to party hearty; as "Bad Humours" suggests, you can "dance and sing to the bloodletting."

Dateline Somalia. A divinely crazed mixture of American soul, Bollywood pastiche, Middle Eastern scales and vaguely Chinese singing flourished in Somalia while the country suffered under Siad Barre's military dictatorship during the 1970s and 1980s. When Barre started bombing Radio Hargeisa, thousands of cassettes were evacuated, buried and—*huzzah*!—eventually rescued. You can get a taste of this stunning music on *Sweet as Broken Dates: Lost Somali Tapes from the Horn of Africa* (Ostinato), featuring tracks like the **Iftiin Band**'s delirious organ blues "Xuduud Ma Leh Xubigaan" (This Love Has No Boundaries) and **Nimco Jamaac**'s synthtastic "Buuraha U Dheer" (The Highest Mountains).

I am, I cried. **Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith**'s mostly electronic concept album *The Kid* (Western Vinyl) is a four-part, lusciously layered rebuttal to Radiohead. In 13 tracks not much longer than pop songs, Smith tells the life story of *a* kid, not Kid A. The conceit is spelled out in the song titles such as "I Am a Thought," "An Intention," "A Kid" and "In the World." The music comes in overlapping, percussionless waves. Synthesizers sound like "real" instruments and vice versa. "I Will Make Room for You" is as dense and beautiful that is is almost claustrophobic. She's not kidding around.

The Copper Children

What We Are

SELF-RELEASED

The Copper Children hail from Denver, and their music is certainly influenced by the kind of airy free spirit that only the Rocky Mountains can foster. Their sophomore album, *What We Are*, continues in the folky vein of their 2014 debut, delivering nine tracks that go down easy and highlight lead singer **Zea Stallings**' clear, crisp vocals and the band's ear for harmony and familiar-sounding melodic shapes. Opening track "Oh Climb Ye Mountain" recalls the pastoral side of The Head and the Heart and introduces the welcome earnestness that pervades the record. Later, the group works in some gospel influences with the old-timey stomp of "Mysterious Ways," and the percussion and acoustic strumming of "Lose Feeling" sound a bit like a Jack Johnson tune with a more adventurous singer at the helm. "Jack and Ginger" finds the band showing off their fun side, while "This Is Heaven" rides the gentle wave of a well-crafted song, easing in with sparsely fingerpicked guitar and building to a beautifully understated, cello-assisted climax. It proves to be one of the album's high points. *Matt Inman*

SIMO

Rise & Shine

MASCOT LABEL GROUP/PROVOGUE

That unique breed of rock-and-roll animal known as the power trio is still alive and kicking, and Nashville-based

guitar slinger **JD Simo** has plenty to say about it. Now into his third full-length album as the frontman of the self-named **SIMO**, he's showing he can stretch out stylistically; where 2016's *Let Love Show the Way* (recorded at the Allmans' famed Big House in Macon, Ga.) sizzled with Southern-fried blues-rock in a classic vein, *Rise & Shine* takes an experimental dive headlong into psychedelic soul and hard-grooving rock, with plenty of effects-soaked atmospherics to enhance the mix. "Return" is the prime jumping-off point, with bassist **Elad Shapiro** and drummer **Adam Abrashoff** laying down a spare, Sly Stone-ish backbeat, while Simo's wah-clipped guitar dips and sashays over the top as he sings, "I've been sinking in slowly, without me even knowing," his voice filtered to a whisper. The song segues into the slow-building, funky "Meditation," and the tone is set, with Simo and the band moving through Memphis soul-tinged rock ("People Say"), syrupy balladry ("I Want Love") and uncorked Blue Cheer-like psychedelia ("Light the Candle"), live and without a net. It takes a level of trust, the true test of any band's longevity, to wander together this far into the unknown. Simo and his mates have proven they can evolve musically and still stoke a red-hot core of creative energy—the real secret behind any power trio worth its salt.

Bill Murphy

Charlie Parr

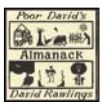
Dog RED HOUSE

A traveling troubadour who hails from the heartland, singer/guitarist **Charlie Parr**—who was weaned on the music of Lightnin' Hopkins, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Charley Patton, after immersing himself in his father's vintage record collection—comes by his passion naturally. Those early standard bearers still make a profound impression on the music he makes, even after releasing more than a dozen albums. For its part, *Dog* carries that banner in a succinct yet subtle way. With 10 tracks comprised of sparse originals and mostly solitary songs, each sounds exactly like a blues, folk or country classic gleaned from another era. Parr's combination of drive and deliberation eschew the need for further accoutrement, yielding a delivery that's as rich and resonate as any of those early icons he emulates so intently. While other players participate in the proceedings, they add little more than some subtle support. Rather, it's Parr's resonator guitar that dominates the spotlight, giving songs such as "I Ain't Dead Yet," "Peaceful Valley," "Dog" and "Another Dog" their decidedly seminal sound. Indeed, Parr is a pro when it comes to echoing an older style that originally emanated from Appalachian porches and the farm fields of the rural South. While *Dog* could be considered a tribute to man's best friend, it also serves as a reminder that authenticity is everything, particularly when it comes to playing essential Americana.

Lee Zimmerman

David Rawlings

Poor David's Almanack ACONY



David Rawlings has been especially prolific of late, fronting Dave Rawlings Machine and working with longtime partner **Gillian Welch** on *Boots No. 1: The Official Revival Bootleg*, a collection of outtakes, demos and alternative tracks from her acclaimed 1996 album *Revival*. Here, Rawlings opts for solo billing with the humble yet earnest *Poor David's Almanack*. Similar in sound to *Nashville Obsolete*, the 2015 opus effort recorded under his Machine banner, the new album features Rawlings' usual cast of collaborators—Welch, **Willie Watson**, Punch Brothers' **Paul Kowert**, Crooked Still's **Brittany Haas**, Old Crow Medicine Show's **Ketch Secor** and Dawes' **Taylor** and **Griffin Goldsmith**—creating a sound that's similarly stripped-down in style. Those unaware might mistake it for a collection of traditional folk tunes repurposed as modern musings, and indeed, Rawlings' penchant for making music of a vintage variety is evident throughout. Fiddles and guitars are prominent in the mix, and the sound of a saw on the lazy, loping "Yup" adds to the imagery of its backwoods banter. The yearning yet tender "Airplane" and the rousing, gospel-sounding "Good God a Woman," a rambling "Midnight Train" and the rugged "Cumberland Gap" make for immediate standouts, but the sobering sentiments of "Guitar Man," "Put 'Em Up Solid" and "Come on Over My House" are affecting additives as well. Here again, *Poor David's Almanack* affirms the fact that Rawlings and Welch are two of today's most influential Americana artists.

Lee Zimmerman

David Crosby

Sky Trails BMG

In the past three years, **David Crosby** has doubled his solo album discography. After releasing one per decade in the '70s (the sublime *If I*

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'In The Wind' available now featuring the hit singles "Set On Fire" and "Windows"
www.magicgiant.com

washingtonsquaremusic.com

1 John McLaughlin and the 4th Dimension

"Meeting of the Spirits"
From the album *Live at Ronnie Abstract Logix*

John McLaughlin is one of music's most influential and groundbreaking guitarists. He brings the music of Mahavishnu Orchestra once again in this beautiful recording. "Greatest Guitar Player Alive" – Jeff Beck (Uncut)

www.abstractlogix.com

2 Aliya Cycon Project

"Heartbeat"
From the album *Prayer.*
Self-released

Fronted by the first female Oud player to graduate from Berklee College of Music, Aliya Cycon Project blends elements of Arabic music into her soulful compositions and Mancini-esque arrangements. Backed by a string section, horns and international rhythm section, Cycon's Oud playing salutes tradition amid wailing solos inspired by modern Western icons.

www.aliyacycon.com

3 Jenn Grant

"Lion With Me"
From the album *Paradise*
Badabing!

Grant's voice and songwriting has been celebrated the world over by critics and the industry. She's described as one of the "best singers in the world" by her ongoing collaborator, Buck 65 (CA), "captivating" by The Line of Best Fit (U.K.) and as having the "work of a painter born in paradise" by The Sydney Morning Herald (AU).

www.jenngrant.com

4 Travers Brothership

"Hold My Name"
From the album *A Way to Survive*
Self-released

Currently on tour in support of their critically acclaimed and award winning album, A Way to Survive, Asheville N.C.'s premier soul/funk/rock band, Travers Brothership, is captivating audiences across the U.S. Their single "Hold My Name" displays the band's tasteful songwriting, soulful vocals and instrumental prowess.

www.traversbrothership.com

5 Curse of Lono

"Five Miles"
From the album *Severed*
Submarine Cat Records

London five-piece Curse of Lono released their debut album Severed earlier this year to great critical acclaim. A sumptuously cinematic record that combines harmony-laden Americana with driving, gothic alt-rock, Severed was recorded at Gun Factory Studio in East London with producer and Boxed In frontman, Oli Bayston.

www.curseoflonoband.com

6 FeelFree

"What a Time!"
From the album *Define the Free*
Self-released

FeelFree is a five-piece band of chill-wave, reggae-rockers born and bred in Washington, D.C.'s metro area. Triumphant horn lines and bluesy guitar licks chauffeur FeelFree's vibrant, soulful sound through the congested avenues of the music scene, and straight to the forefront of today's up-and-coming bands.

www.feelfree703.com

7 Kingsborough

"Subtle Lies"
From the album *1544*
Self-released

Driven by an urgent, authentic rock-and-roll sound, California-based Kingsborough is renowned for their modern twist of old-school "working band" mentality and for delivering raw, high-energy live performances much like Springsteen and Petty. Newly released album 1544 features heaving-hitting songs like "Subtle Lies," melodic songwriting and lavish vocals with "Wild Ones."

www.kingsboroughmusic.com

8 Alex Cuba

"Piedad De Mi"
From the album *Lo Unico Constante*
Caracol Records

Over the course of six albums, Alex has explored and expanded on Cuban influences of Soviet-era Cuba in the '70s and '80s with its focus on nueva trova and jazz. His newest offering, Lo Único Constante (The One Constant) reflects on the intimate beauty of the guitar and vocals in homage to his earliest influences of the Filin era, to the heart of the songwriting craft.

www.alexcuba.com

9 Earth to Clark

"City Sounds"
From the album *The Giving Tree*
Self-released

Homegrown in Wisconsin, this five-piece has become a mainstay in the conscious music scene after the 2017 release of their debut album The Giving Tree. Blending elements of funk, hip-hop, reggae and electronic, they have shared the stage with noble acts such as Tribal Seeds, Satsang and more.

www.earthtoclark.com

10 Galbraith Group

"Strippaman"
From the album *Galbraith Group*
Self-released

Galbraith Group is an instrumental family power trio with a sound that is intensely rock 'n' roll, although heavily veined in blues-roots with a healthy dose of conceptual jazz-fusion and funk. This trio is built on heavy grooves and riffs with progressive edge, intense guitar-driven solos and lengthy improv.

www.galbraithmusic.com

11 Secret Sage

"Ballad of Jody Rosalie"
From the album *Omi*
Milligan's Island Records

Formed on the fringes of the Massachusetts music scene, Secret Sage has quickly become one of the area's most beloved bands. Defined by the union of global flavor and American roots, their sound is playful and positive. Sprightly, jubilant and sometimes strange, Secret Sage is sure to leave an impression.

www.secretsage.org

12 Dar Stellabotta

"Herb Lady"
From the album *One Woman Jam*
Self-released

Dar Stellabotta is a musician from Southern Maryland, who builds cigar box guitars. She uses her very first handmade CBG for her performances and just released her first CBG album in September 2017. It's jam-packed with muddy distortion, slide guitar and kick drum.

www.darstellabotta.com

13 Editor's Pick: The National

"The System Only Dreams in Total Darkness"
From the album *Sleep Well Beast*
4AD LTD.

Over their 16-year career, The National has sold over 1.7 million albums in the U.S. alone, having released seven studio albums including their most recent, Sleep Well Beast. The album is the follow-up to 2013's GRAMMY® nominated Trouble Will Find Me. Both individually and collectively, The National's members have been involved in countless artistic, charitable and socio-political pursuits.

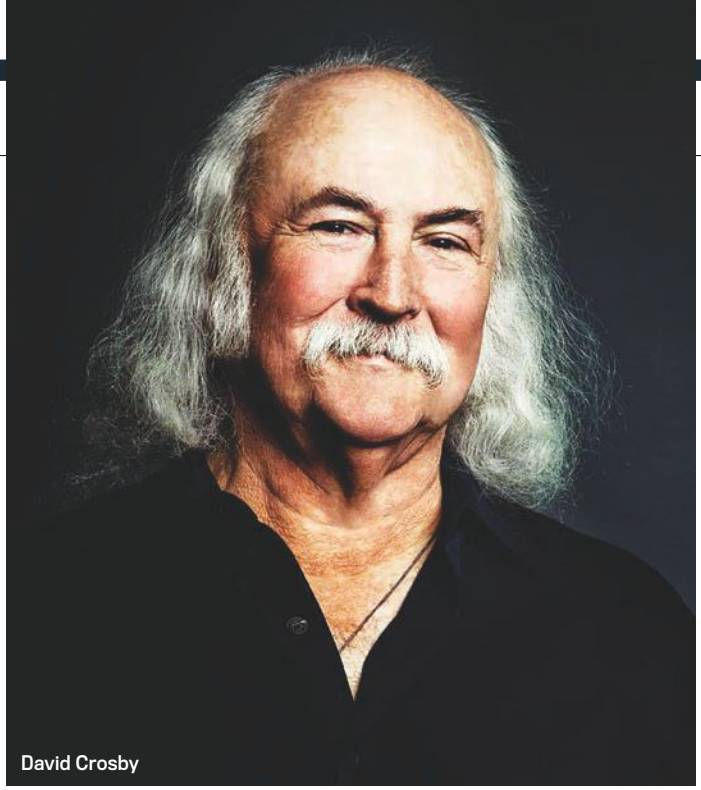
www.americanmary.com

14 JamOFF! Winner: Strange Jazz Universe

"Strange Universe"
From the album *Two Moons*
The LA Sound Group

Ron Bruner Sr. (AKA "Strange Jazz Universe"), a native of Compton, Calif., has performed with many artists during his freelance career. The Temptations, Gary Bartz, J*Davey and Kamasi Washington, which left him full of ideas. "SJU" allows for that expression. Current project "Two Moons" reflects this. Please enjoy the music.

www.reverbnation.com/strangejazzuniverse


David Crosby

Could Only Remember My Name), '80s and '90s, he's now put out three more since 2014: *Croz*, a full-band effort; *Lighthouse*, a stripped-down, largely acoustic set steered by Snarky Puppy's Michael League; and now *Sky Trails*, which falls somewhere between the two with a tilt toward jazzier structures. His sudden prolificacy aside, what is immediately striking about all three is the undeniable quality of the work. For a guy who came so close so many times to blowing it all, Crosby is arguably in a better place creatively than he's been in more than four decades—his compositional skills and vocal performances betraying nary a hint of deterioration. Croz is well aware that he does, at 75, have some limitations and he's perfectly fine with delegation. Here, as he's done often in the past two decades, Crosby's working tightly with his son, producer **James Raymond**, who plays keyboards and co-wrote four of the new tunes. (There's only one cover, Joni Mitchell's "Amelia.") Among the new songs, "Capitol," which takes aim at the pathetic current political climate, "Curved Air," riding atop a modified flamenco rhythm and the harmony-rich "Sell Me a Diamond" (which, in a previous lifetime, might've made a classic CSN tune), are highlights. But so is "Before Tomorrow Falls on Love," a breathtakingly graceful ballad that takes it almost entirely down to voice and piano. As hard as it would've been to imagine at one time, David Crosby is not merely a survivor; he's making some of the best music of his life.
Jeff Tamarkin

Peaking Lights
The Fifth State of Consciousness
TWO FLOWERS

For about a decade, married duo **Indra Dunis** and **Aaron Coyes** have made blissful, dubbed-out psychedelic pop as **Peaking Lights**. The project found its footing in the DIY experimental scene, and while early records were cloaked in tape hiss, the band's latest, double LP *The Fifth State of Consciousness*, falls in line with previous outings *Lucifer* and *Cosmic Logic* by presenting Dunis and Coyes' sound in a mostly unobstructed fashion. It's a clear-sounding record, but by no means less far out or frisky. "I'm wondering where my mind has gone to now," Dunis sings on opener "Dreaming Outside," a fitting intro for the mystically minded album, which segues from swirling dance music ("Coyote Ghost Melodies") to ornate rock pageantry ("A Phoenix and a Fish") to bass-heavy, reggae-inflected ballads ("In My Disguise"). As it outlines a transcendent journey, our protagonists move from the daily grind into the "electric sunset" that Dunis sings about on the album's closer "Wild Paradise." Recorded at their own Dreamfuzz Studio, which was designed to assemble the band's makeshift, anything-goes pop collages, the album melds Lee "Scratch" Perry-styled dubs to house beats and synthetic ambiance. But perhaps most exciting is the band's newfound use of AM gold textures. "I'll Be in the Sky" and "Love Can Move Mountains" almost feel like they could fit in an ELO album, and "In My Disguise" makes over *Tango in the Night*-era Fleetwood Mac into an experimental-rock outfit. Another solidly heady set from these long-running freakazoids. ***Jason P. Woodbury***

Matthew Sweet
Tomorrow Forever
HONEYCOMB HIDEOUT

Power-pop savant **Matthew Sweet** has shared his reverence for radio-friendly rock for the past 35 years. While his series of *Under the Covers* records, made with pal **Susanna Hoffs**, has demonstrated his devotion to archival pop—the duo takes on three decades worth of standards, starting with the '60s and nudging up to the '90s—it's been six years since Sweet released a record of original material. During this eventful time, he and his wife relocated to Nebraska and his mother passed away—but, even so, on *Tomorrow Forever* his style remains familiar. Songs such as "Trick," "Entangled," "Circle," "Music for Love" and "End Is Near" could easily have fit among the tracks of earlier albums like *Girlfriend*, *Altered Beast* or *100% Fun*. What's particularly impressive is the amount of material composed with this project in mind—some 38 tunes in total, 17 of which are included here. With an all-star backing band that includes **Gary Louris, Debbi Peterson**, **Rod Argent** and members of **Velvet Crush** and **The Orange Peels**, success was inevitable, and the hushed harmonies, ready refrains and Sweet's sugary sentiments are a welcome return. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Jim Avett and Family
For His Children and Ours
RAMSEUR

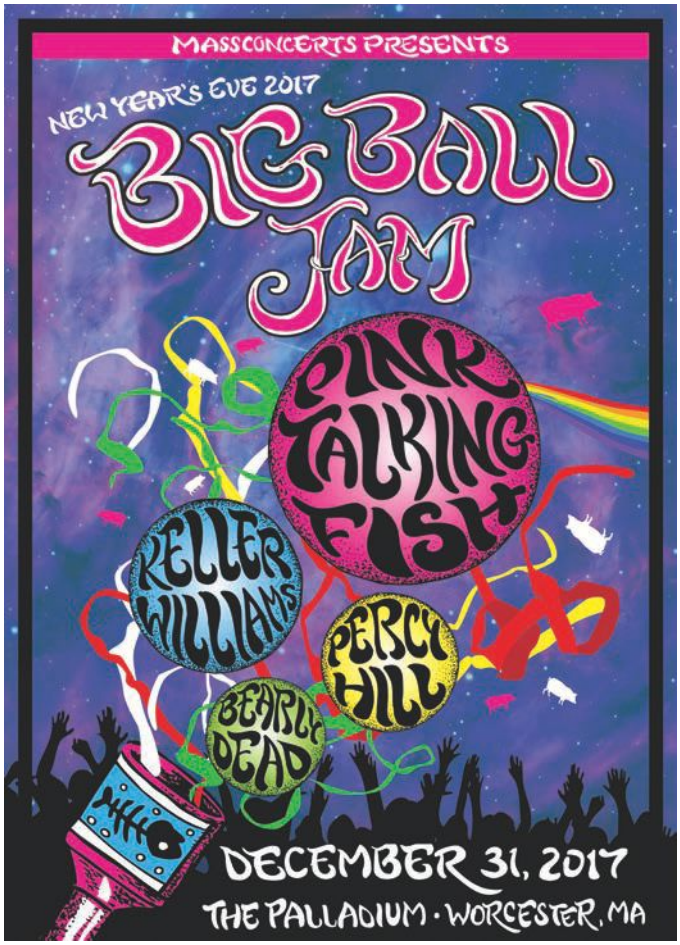
The last time that **Jim Avett and Family** released an LP was in 2008, right before his sons jumped from second-stage festival favorites to torchbearers of modern Americana with their roots-pop breakthrough *I and Love and You*. And, almost a decade later, the elder Avett and his now far-more-famous family band return for another set that manages to maintain the sincerity and intimacy of its predecessor. In one of their signature songs "Murder in the City," **The Avett Brothers** spoke of their dad's devotion in poignant terms. ("I wondered what my dad would say/ He said, 'I love you and I'm proud of you both/ In so many different ways.'") A similar reverence is expressed here, albeit the kind that speaks to spirituality in traditional terms. Indeed, many of these songs will be familiar to anyone who has spent time in a church pew, but the Avetts reframe these canonical works for a secular audience, too. "Just a Closer Walk With Thee" and "Peace in the Valley" harken back to hymnals, while Hank Williams' "I Saw the Light" and Randy Travis' "I'm Gonna Have a Little Talk" move to the mainstream while keeping the sacred sentiments intact. Granted, a gospel album isn't what most Avett Brothers fans might expect, given their wild and rowdy ways. Still, **Scott**, **Seth** and their sister **Bonnie** do their due diligence and fully participate in the proceedings. It's a homespun setup, the ideal accompaniment when congregating on the front porch with family and friends. And it's so sweet and sincere, it could make believers out of us all.
Lee Zimmerman

Wyclef Jean
Carnival III: The Fall and Rise of a Refugee LEGACY

If Lauryn Hill were to surprise-drop a new album tomorrow, then you best believe that this news would be at the top of every music and pop-culture site. If only the same could be said for the Fugees' chief architect, **Wyclef Jean**, whose public image took a hit following controversy over disaster-relief funds funneled through his failed charitable organization, Yéle, after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Yet on the excellent third installment of his *Carnival* series, Jean delivers a record as redemptive as Jay-Z's *4:44*. This isn't so much a sequel as it is a rebirth of a man whose troubadour MC soul continues to reveal his mastery for both melodicism ("Borrowed Time," "Carry On") and multi-cultural body moving ("Fela Kuti," "Trapicabana"). And if you forgot about his potency as an MC, then skip directly to "Double Dutch." Don't sleep on *Carnival III*; give Jean a chance to remind you why Young Thug named his 2016 song after him in the first place. ***Ron Hart***

Country Joe McDonald
50 RAG BABY

Country Joe McDonald, now 75, recently announced that he's planning to retire, which may very well make *50*—as in the number of years since his debut album with Country Joe and the Fish—his farewell statement. If that is the case, then McDonald can be proud that he's getting out while he's still got his songwriting and performing chops. Whether by design or coincidence, *50* feels like a somewhat less lysergic update of that long-ago band. None of the other Fish play on it—he's working here with a small crew that includes guitarist **James DePrato**, bassist **Blair Hardman** (who recorded with McDonald in 1965), drummer **Prairie Prince** and vocalist **Diana Mangano**—but there's an airy, spacey quality to the production (by McDonald and **Michael Rosen**) that can't help but recall those headier days. In terms of content, McDonald, while acknowledging time's passing, is also rooted in today's world. Though there is a misty, nostalgic quality to "Where Did the Time Go" and the folkadelic opener "Round and Round," other tracks, particularly "Era of Guns"—which addresses the scourge that has taken way too many in 21st-century America—employ McDonald's always-pointed skill as a commentator on the human condition. Remarkably, McDonald's voice seems to not have aged a bit since he first made his mark in the days of Monterey and Woodstock. Whether rocking hard or laying back in a ballad (the heartbreaking "Black Fish"), he



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Reviews

remains an expressive purveyor of song. One highlight doesn't need a voice at all to find its way to your heart: the nine-minute instrumental "Seashore Symphony #2," adapted from McDonald's 2005 *Natural Imperfections*, is precisely what its title suggests. It's so soothing that you'll want to put it on a loop and play it at your bedside as you drift off. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Randall Bramblett

Juke Joint at the Edge of the World NEW WEST

For much of his career, **Randall Bramblett** played the role of a journeyman musician, shifting his support to whatever artist was fortunate enough to secure his services. His stints with Gregg Allman, Bonnie Raitt, Widespread Panic, Sea Level, Steve Winwood and Traffic helped secure a notable reputation, although his solo work has often been overshadowed by those other associations. Still, as a multi-instrumentalist who is well versed on keyboards, guitar, horns and harmonica, Bramblett is fully capable of delivering distinctive albums of his own, as the bold and boisterous *Juke Joint at the Edge of the World* makes clear. Blazing sax solos on the aptly named "Trippy Little Thing" and the exotic "Mali Katra," and the funky rhythms that underscore the jazzy "Plan B," the punchy, pervasive "Garbage Man" and "Devil's Haircut" highlight blues-colored, roadhouse parameters. Bramblett's vocals, which combine a smoothness with an assured authority, help define the sound, but it's the connection to his Southern roots that inevitably informs each loosely limbered excursion. He's also a cocksure wordsmith—it takes a brave soul to claim, "We could be the next Simon and Garfunkel"—and indeed, it's his good nature and range of expression that help propel the proceedings. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Waxahatchee

Out in the Storm MERGE

On her fourth album, singer-songwriter **Katie Crutchfield**, who records as **Waxahatchee**, dials up the volume and grit, matching her unabashed sincerity with noisy pop glee. "You tell a classic story," she accuses her partner in a final-straw moment on the Yo La Tengo-styled "Silver" and, over the course of 10 songs, she reclaims her power, exploring well-worn and universal themes and offering a perspective all her own. On previous records, including 2013's *Cerulean Salt* and 2015's *Ivy Tripp*, Crutchfield favored minimalist sketches, mostly built on strummed acoustic guitars and synths. But *Out in the Storm* pairs her with producer **John Agnello**, whose work on albums by Dinosaur Jr. and Sonic Youth clearly informs Crutchfield's sound. She doesn't entirely forsake ballads—"A Little More" recalls R.E.M.'s folksiest moments and closer "Fade" is bathed in piano and delayed acoustic guitar—but she spends the record alternating between quiet numbers and booming ones. On "Hear You," she sings, "I want to dry your tears" over a bombastic synth bass line and grunge drums before breaking into a triumphant chorus. On the hooky "No Question," she calls out some dirtbag, sighing "It never ends" over the wild lead guitar of **Katie Harkin** (touring guitarist with Sleater-Kinney). Even in its dialed back moments, Crutchfield imbues the record with an instrumental depth. On the starkly personal "8 Ball," the mood suggests the Pixies at their most restrained, but the surf guitars, handclaps and bubbling bass never obscure Crutchfield's empowered message: "I am the wind blowing down your tree." ***Jason P. Woodbury***

Ducktails

Jersey Devil NEW IMAGES

"Devil" might not be the word that immediately comes to mind as the first seconds of **Ducktails**' sixth album begin to unfurl. "Angel" could be more apt—opener "Map to the Stars" sounds a bit like floating through heavenly clouds, with pillowy keys set aloft and frontman **Matthew Mondanile** cooing, "Heard you say you lost your way through the constellation/ I can guide you somewhere else in the right direction." Ducktails became Mondanile's main artistic outlet when he departed from Real Estate in 2016, and his heightened attention shows: *Jersey Devil* is a more focused, memorable collection of tunes than 2015's *St. Catherine*. But Mondanile still remains a bit too comfortable inside his dreamy, indie-rock cocoon for the record to truly elevate Ducktails. The project began as an experimental playground for Mondanile's lo-fi compositions before he co-founded his former indie-darling band, and his years of playing pop music left a mark on Ducktails—with 2013's psych-rock leaning *The Flower Lane*, those experiments crystallized into playfully laid-back songs. *Jersey Devil* continues that trajectory, upgrading the sound with some heavier grooving guitars, slippery basslines and crisp percussion. Mondanile goes full-on Zombies with "In the Hallway," playing a simple, plaintive tune and a slyly repetitive guitar line that blossoms into a gorgeous ascending melody. He's soaring through a daydream with the meditative, mellow "Map to the Stars." And on "Keeper of the Garden," he sings some impressively candid, devoted words to his mother.

But not enough of *Jersey Devil* really sticks; it's lovely in its moment, but slip-slides away too quickly.
Justin Jacobs

Tyler Edwards
A Few Good Hearts SELF-RELEASED

Tyler Edwards, the South Carolina-born and Seattle-based singer-songwriter conveys a stealth-like view in his moody melodies, breaching sensitive fare with a reliable rock stance that recalls Jason Isbell, Ryan Adams and The Avett Brothers in its unassuming honesty. Like those artists, Edwards pays little heed to posturing or pretence, prioritizing sentiment rather than a gratuitous persona. Southern in spirit, *A Few Good Hearts* possesses an unrelenting defiance and determination that pervades the album. His stark observations and sobering perspectives suggest that he's confronting unwieldy issues that can't always be neatly encapsulated in a song. Even so, his melodies and musings remain in sync. Occasionally, Edwards contrasts his introverted tendencies with a welcome rowdiness—the sudden whoop of "Hazy Goodbye" and "Talk So Tough" show he's more than a sullen guy who spends his time moping about the state of affairs. "...Take your chance while you're still young...Don't rush me/ I just want a little more time," he sings on the anthemic "Don't Rush Me." For its part, "Pretty People" recalls "Californication" in its shout out to the Golden State, offering Edwards a reasonable shot for airplay and perhaps a commercial or two. Mostly though, he maintains an introspective, contemplative sound, and on this auspicious full-length solo debut, Edwards shows he's clearly a credible contender. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Hortlax Cobra
Lightworks INGRID

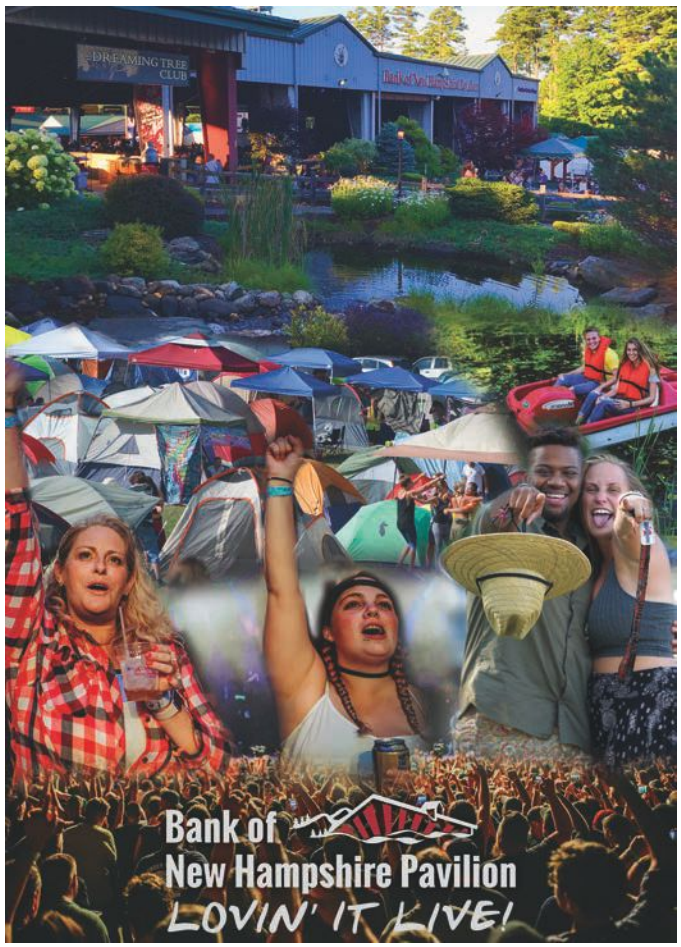
Swedish trio Peter Bjorn & John have spent their career banking on a certain quirk factor that makes their pop more than just radio fodder. Now imagine if they took the same ecstatic energy and refocused it on coercing you to dance. That's the idea behind **Hortlax Cobra**, the side-project of **John Eriksson**, the percussionist third of the PB&J. On his latest, this spring's *Lightworks*, Eriksson partnered with some of Sweden's best and brightest pop vocalists to create a patchwork of gorgeously textured dancefloor anthems. Without one steady singer, *Lightworks* plays like a fantastically fun playlist for a late-night European house party, with just enough variance in tones and tempos to keep things interesting. **Ane Brun**'s unassuming, bird-in-flight delivery makes "I'm Still Here" a sensitive but thumping track–like the best song Robyn never recorded. Things heat up quickly, though. "Night Still Young" shivers with intensity, a foreboding wall of sound in constant free fall as house-music drums whip up a frenzy and **Jennie Abrahamson** sings, "There's still heartache to come" like a serpent. Tracks like "Bus Stop" stay on target with the funky, light idiosyncrasies of the best PB&J tunes, but largely *Lightworks* is a sexier collection of music. At just eight tracks, along with an atmospheric opener and closer, the album is over before the party really gets heated. ***Justin Jacobs***

Daniel Martin Moore
Turned Over to Dreams SOFABURN

Daniel Martin Moore's always been prone to making music with a decided hush and haze. Given that penchant for such soundscapes, the transition to songs intended to coax the little ones off to slumberland isn't exactly a stretch. Yet, *Turned Over to Dreams* is so mellow, so subdued, so somnolent and so pervasive that it presents a very good possibility that parents may nod off as well. The twinkling title track and "Good Evening, Good Night" maintain a twilight glow all on their own, and his covers of the Jeri Southern/Gail Allen jazz standard "Touch the Earth" and the Mr. Rogers nugget "It's Such a Good Feeling" ensure that the setting stays consistently blissful. It's a lovely set of songs for sure, but don't underestimate its complexities—it may take multiple listens to fully appreciate all its nuances. Plus, it's so damn soothing that it could take several attempts to get to the closing track without falling asleep.
Lee Zimmerman

Jim Lauderdale
London Southern PROPER RECORDS

After a series of rapid-pace releases that included multiple co-writes with Robert Hunter, **Jim Lauderdale** has ever so slightly pulled back on his output. (Those keeping score will still note that he's averaged at least one album per year since 1998.) Still, if Lauderdale's current intent is to cull the best material for one record, then *London Southern* finds the plan paying off. Although this Nashville-based multitasker might otherwise seem out of his element recording in a place with more Brits than grits, London clearly provides a sympathetic setting. With Nick Lowe's backing band in tow, Lauderdale mines his usual influences—Buck Owens, George Jones, Eddy Arnold and The Beatles chief among them—while also affirming an ability to pen songs that come across like instant classics, even on first encounter. As always, his diversity is impressive; the honky-tonk sway of "Sweet



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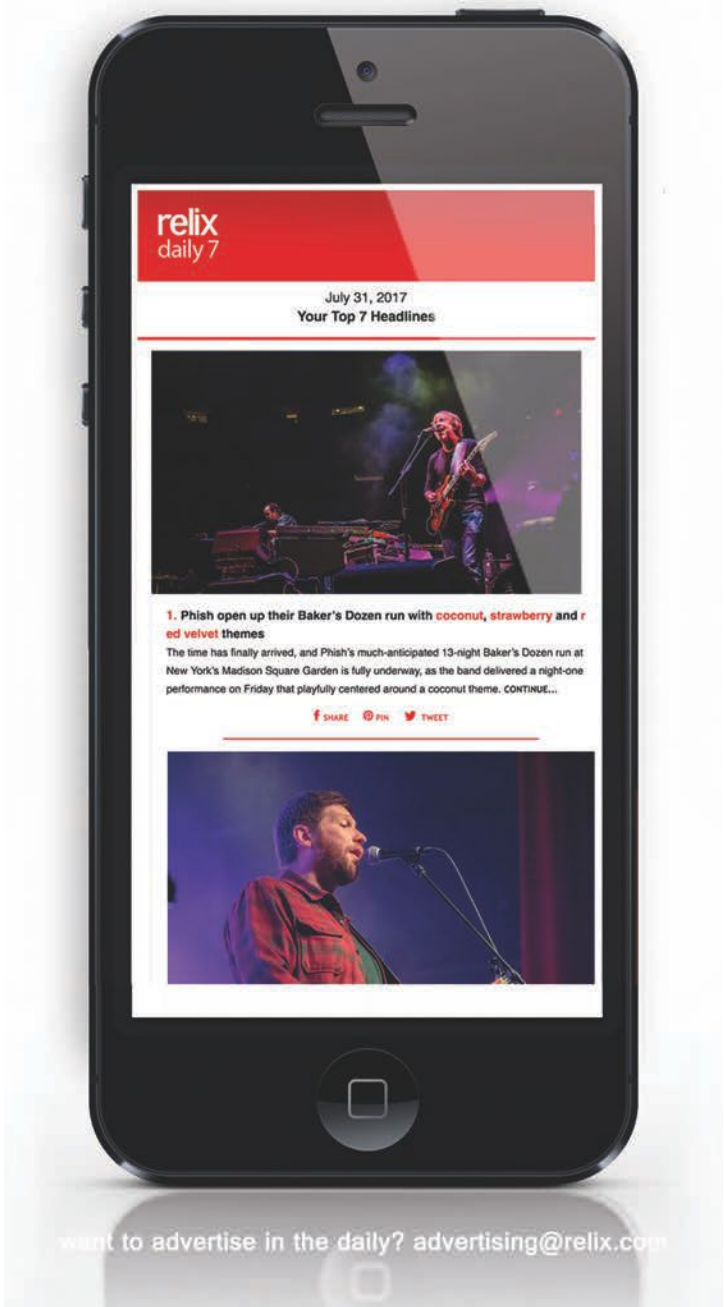
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Time" and the irrepressible twang of "Don't Shut Me Down" rest easy among the soulful strains of "What Have You Got to Lose" and "Different Kind of Groove Some Time." Like legions of British musicians before them, Lowe's band is adept at picking, plucking and getting into an Americana spirit, making *London Southern* an admirable pond-crossing collaboration. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Mister Heavenly

Boxing the Moonlight POLYVINYL

Based on their résumés alone, you'd assume that the gentlemen behind **Mister Heavenly** could create something interesting. The trio consists of **Ryan Kattner**, the howling, face-painted banshee behind carnival barkers Man Man; **Nicholas Thorburn** of lo-fi weirdos Unicorns and alt-pop maestros Islands; and **Joe Plummer**, who's played with Modest Mouse, The Shins and Cold War Kids. That might not spell amazing—but it does spell noteworthy. The band's first release, 2011's *Out of Love*, was a front-loaded pop-rock album; fun, but uneven. Six years later, they return with *Boxing the Moonlight*, an altogether better realization of what Mister Heavenly could be. This time out, they've crafted a far heavier, swaying and swaggering collection of ultra-catchy cabaret rock. Kattner's gruff vocals lay a gravel bed under which Thorburn flutters about—all inside bubbles of tight, churning guitars and some rubber-bouncing percussion. At the three musicians' cores, though, is a knack for tight (if wacky) pop. And in that respect, the closest parallel to *Boxing the Moonlight* may be Cheap Trick. "No Floor" races along with straightforward, rhythmic guitar and floor toms, with a chorus that was handcrafted from the pop-rock playbook, complete with background "Ahh"s. And lead-off "Beat Down" is quaint and piano-led, with Thorburn grinning, "I want a beat down, but just for the education/ I want a three-way, but just for the conversation." The song brightly bursts at the seams as all voices join together, like the three nodded to each other in a dark garage and yelled "Go!" ***Justin Jacobs***

Cults

Offering SINDERLYN

Like Best Coast and Sleigh Bells, New York duo **Cults** slid some lo-fi gems quietly onto the internet and watched them spark and explode. In their case, the tunes were the infectious, undeniably hummable "Go Outside" and the classic girl-group aping "You Know What I Mean"—both delicious vintage pop. But where those first mentioned acts largely stayed the course as they became full-fledged success stories, **Madeline Follin** and **Brian Oblivion** were never afraid to dive into experimentation. On the band's third album, *Offering*, they spread the love, embracing darkly enrapturing, buzzing dance jams, wondrous dream-pop and refreshingly straightforward pop-rock. What ties it all together is Follin's gorgeous, porcelain vocals, which would sound equally adept in a deep-house track or a Supremes cover. Maybe most surprising are the new comparisons that *Offering* draws. The title track thumps and buzzes, with synth lines squirming underneath Follin's wide-open melody, recalling electro-duo Phantogram. On the swirling "Recovery," Cults sound like perfect tourmates for Beach House; the twinkling, plucked guitar and the syrupy vocal melody is a pure daydream soundtrack. Cults dips back into the style of their original breakthroughs with the ghostly "Good Religion," a tight, piano-led tune that recalls a Motown hit recorded in an echo chamber. Follin sings, "Slowly I'll stumble, a creature of habit, but I won't care about the things I used to know." *Offering* proves that Cults refuse to be tied down by the past, but doesn't have any shame in reviving it. ***Justin Jacobs***

Head for the Hills

Potions and Poisons

SELF-RELEASED

"Bitter black coffee at 11 a.m. goes down sweet with that nicotine breakfast," **Adam Kinghorn** sings midway through *Potions and Poisons*, **Head for the Hills**' fourth studio record. In addition to caffeine and nicotine, the album is full of vices and personal perils, including greed, death, deceit and more. Yet, it would be a disservice to call this a somber LP. Through 10 tracks, the Colorado quartet maintains a steady pace that prevents *Potions and Poisons* from buckling under its gloomy subject matter. Instrumental tracks like "Floodwaters" and "Bucker" keep things lively, with each member (Kinghorn on guitar, **Joe Lessard** on fiddle, **Matt Loewen** on bass and new addition **Sam Parks** on mandolin) showing off their best jamgrass riffs. Considered by some to be "post-bluegrass," Head for the Hills adhere to some traditional aspects of the genre, but also incorporate elements

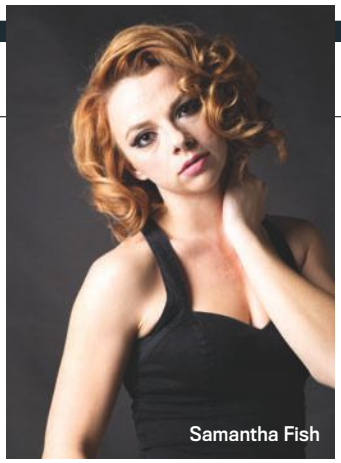
of jazz, soul and folk music into their repertoire. Effectively, *Potions and Poisons*' scarce arrangements prove a certain maturity. The band combines soulful ambiance with nimble twanging to create a strings-only record that still maintains a thumping heartbeat. (Though, to be fair, there is a percussive washboard on "Kings and Cowards," supplied by Elephant Revival's **Bonnie Paine.**) In short, *Potions and Poisons* chronicles the pitfalls of humanity, without being dragged down to their level. You hear it most on "Suit and Tie," where the band merges beautiful vocal harmonies with toe-tapping string solos and poignant lyrics. It makes you question if you should kick up your feet or fall into a state of contemplation. And perhaps that was the goal all along.

Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

Matthew Logan Vasquez

Does What He Wants DINE ALONE

As leader of the rustic California indie-rock band Delta Spirit, **Matthew Logan Vasquez** specialized in soul-tinged rock anthems, suited to big screen invocations of Americana. On his sophomore solo release, *Does What He Wants*, he narrows the scope



Samantha Fish

thematically but widens the sound, incorporating elements of synth-pop, funk, gospel and soul into his Heartland rock. Originally envisioned as a new Delta Spirit album, the LP sounds like a band effort, with drum-heavy arrangements and huge-sounding guitars. "Same" and "Fires Down in Mexico" ooze a glitzy funk bent, landing somewhere between *Young Americans*-era Bowie and Joe Cocker, with a heavy dose of gospel-backing for good measure. But Vasquez trades in intimacy, too. The record's best songs, like the Springsteen-evoking "Fatherhood," sketch scenes of mortality and responsibility, reflecting on the obligations and duties of being a dad. On the sparse "Tall Man," he recounts a story about a broken figure on the road—it leans into a rootsy template, heavy on the regional references, but Vasquez sings with enough heart and soul to overcome its familiar formula, centering on a tender examination of fathers and sons. Vasquez's voice transforms to match each song—whether evoking Roy Orbison's stately croon on "The Fighter" or adopting a booze-swilling Nilsson tone on album standout "Red Fish," he knows what he's doing. The album peters out some in the back half, but when Vasquez is at his best, his scenes match the intensity of his howl. *Jason Woodbury*

Samantha Fish

Belle of the West RUF

After releasing *Chills & Fever* earlier this year, **Samantha Fish** didn't waste any time before returning to the studio to record her fifth album, *Belle of the West*. While she's known for basking in the blues, *Belle of the West* finds her expanding her palette to a degree, with "Blood in the Water" and the title tune injecting an Americana influence into her rootsy routine. Of course, there's no mistaking the swampy sound of "Gone for Good" or the traditional trappings of "Poor Black Mattie" and "Nearing Home." That's all part of her signature style. Having garnered the Blues Music Award for Best New Artist Debut in 2012, she's done quite well within that particular musical motif. However, like Bonnie Raitt and Susan Tedeschi, she often takes liberties and bends the boundaries. Her songs are both scrappy and suggestive—the sassy "Gone for Good" and cynical "Don't Say You Love Me" emphasize some edge and attitude. That's another sign of confidence, and given the fact that she's always commanding an impressive cast of musicians—in this case, **Luther Dickinson**, **Amy LaVere** and **Jimbo Mathus** among them—it's quite obvious that she's lacking neither inspiration nor support. It's little wonder then that *Belle of the West* is her most diverse set yet, proving that, even while giving the blues its due, she's eager to imbue other additives.

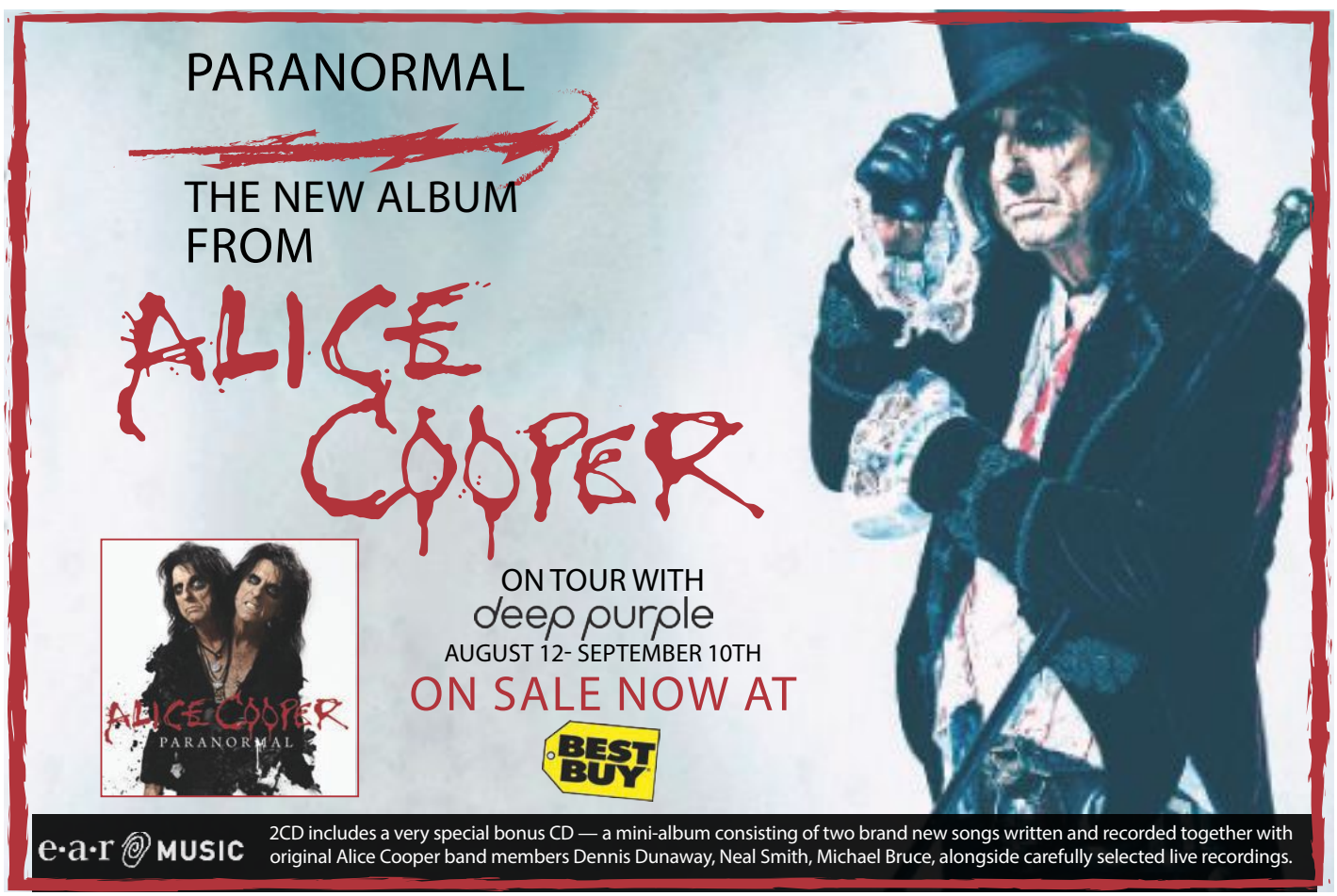
Lee Zimmerman

Shelby Lynne and Allison Moorer

Not Dark Yet

SILVER CROSS/THIRTY TIGERS

When you countrify a song from a distinctly different genre, there's really only one bar to try and match: Johnny Cash's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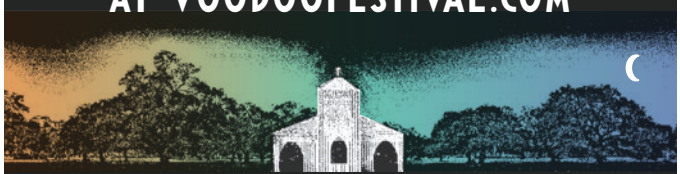
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Reviews

American Recordings series. It is not an easy task, but one undertaken by singer-songwriter sisters **Shelby Lynne** and **Allison Moorer** on their first-ever joint recording, *Not Dark Yet*. The album features songs by a range of different artists, from Nick Cave to Nirvana, and more country-slanted ones like Merle Haggard and the Louvin Brothers, as well as one original. Nearly each song feels tailor-made for their voices, with the two often harmonizing to create a rather rich sound that's hard to find these days. This isn't that surprising—these two are veterans, with 24 albums and decades of experience between them. Not to mention that their backing band includes pros **Doug Pettibone** (Lucinda Williams) and **Benmont Tench** (Tom Petty), which never hurts. Album highlights include the opener "My List," a gorgeous rework of the bombastic tune from the Killers' 2006 album *Sam's Town*, a mellow version of Jason Isbell and Amanda Shires' "The Color of a Cloudy Day," and a dusky-desert sounding version of Townes Van Zandt's "Lungs." But it's the title track that steals the show, a version of Bob Dylan's "Not Dark Yet" from his acclaimed 1997 album *Time Out of Mind*. Both Lynne and Moorer sing with heart and passion, taking the song into a redemptive space, even when the lyrics suggest otherwise. The only misstep here is their version of Nirvana's "Lithium"—the arrangement feels out of place and their vocals sound off-kilter instead of in sync. But overall, this partnership has been a long time coming and, hopefully, it's a fantastic preview of what these two songwriting aces can do together in the future. ***Mike Ayers***

Steven Wilson

To the Bone CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL

It's reductive to call **Steven Wilson** a prog-rock musician. His work in Porcupine Tree evolved from Pink Floyd-aping psychedelia to lush alternative pop, and his solo trajectory, with its electronic detours and elaborate concepts, has been even knottier and harder to predict. *To the Bone*, his latest release and fifth solo LP, may have hardcore prog fans raising their eyebrows at his art-pop excursions—throughout, Wilson mines the '80s influencers from his childhood, drawing influence from Kate Bush's *Hounds of Love*, Tears for Fears' *The Seeds of Love* and Peter Gabriel's *So*. "Refuge" borrows its oceanic piano chords and tick-tock percussion from Gabriel's "Red Rain," and the title-track, with its looped electronic beats and tremolo guitar, is such a vintage Gabriel groove that he could've pushed for a co-writing credit. Elsewhere, Wilson plunges head-first into accessibility—and given that his core fan base is filled with nerdy dudes wearing King Crimson T-shirts, you have to respect the *cojones*. On the frantic "Permanating," he swoops into a falsetto sing-along that he's described as a meeting ground between ABBA, ELO and Daft Punk. But don't write off the record as lightweight, either in arrangement or lyrical scope: Hard-rock barnburner "People Who Eat Darkness" confronts the aftermath of unknowingly living next door to a terrorist. With its sharper contrast of light and dark, *To the Bone* may be Wilson's most impressive balancing act to date. ***Ryan Reed***

Mutemath

Play Dead WOJTEK

Is it because frontman **Paul Meany** sings with an earnestness rare in modern rock? Or that their lyrics occasionally grapple with spiritual themes? Or because their former label, to their detriment and extreme irritation, once marketed them as a "Christian" band? For whatever reason, **Mutemath** remain one of alternative music's most unfairly marginalized bands. After the synth-pop flirtations of their fourth LP, 2015's *Vitals*, the New Orleans quartet revisit their experimental side with *Play Dead*, which cross-pollinates the electronic pulses of its predecessor with the prog-soul mutations of 2011's *Odd Soul*. Opener "Hit Parade," a bold choice for the lead single, moves away from a verse-chorus structure, piling psychedelic synth atmospheres and tumbling funk riffs into a five-minute decathlon that summarizes their entire catalog. Mutemath seem to enjoy the thrill of sonic shock, as the album zig-zags between styles moment-by-moment: "Stroll On" nods to '90s electronica with its gargled, distorted synth-bass; "Break the Fever" legitimately echoes Michael Jackson in its staccato vocal phrasing and gooey, glossy beat; and the cosmic keys on "Nuisance" nod to '70s Tangerine Dream. The glue, as usual, is drummer **Darren King**, one of the most versatile and overlooked beat fiends on the planet. *Play Dead* is worth the price of admission just to hear his work on "Achilles Heel"—as the band morphs from a swaggering electro-rap groove to a groggy firestorm, you'll wonder if King sprouted two extra limbs mid-song. ***Ryan Reed***

Rainer Maria

S/T POLYVINYL

Wisconsin three-piece **Rainer Maria** was a staple of the late-'90s emo scene. The group called it quits in 2006, walking away after five albums. The musicians have since played a few reunion shows, but *S/T* represents the band's first new release in over

a decade. The album, produced by band member **William Kuehn** and mixed by Deerhoof's **Greg Saunier**, harkens back to those original years, pairing indie-rock guitar riffs, propulsive beats and singer **Caithlin De Marrais**' buoyant vocals. On "Suicides and Lazy Eyes," a hazy, rollicking rock number, there's a sense that the band never left. These songs feel like a natural extension of their discography, which culminated in 2006 with *Catastrophe Keeps Us Together*. Of course, the lyrics reflect the years that have passed. De Marrais, who has unveiled several solo albums on her own since the band ended, draws on a country life outside of New York City. On "Forest Mattress" she wails, "I'm talking to the flowers just to have a friend," while on "Ornaments of Empty," an emotional song that rings of urgency and recalls what made the original years of emo so compelling, De Marrais considers what is left after something is dead and gone. The real thesis of the album comes on "Blackbird," where De Marrais reflects "What I am is what I always was/ Now it's coming back to me." It's a moment of clarity for the band as they find themselves making another album so many years later. Even after their lengthy time apart, they've managed to create an album without a drop of nostalgia—*S/T* is simply a continuation after a long pause. ***Emily Zemler***

Andy Hall & Roosevelt Collier

Let the Steel Play SELF-RELEASED

Let the Steel Play unites two masters of slide guitar from two very different backgrounds. This collaborative album features the combined forces of The Infamous Stringdusters' dobroist **Andy Hall** and "sacred steel" veteran, and member of The Lee Boys, **Roosevelt Collier** making for some exciting and impressive intertwining riffs, rhythms and melodies. The duo first met while aboard Jam Cruise in 2012, and they have played together at various points since. While Collier—aka "The Dr."—brings plenty of his House of God-honed pedal-steel influence, Hall's classic bluegrass flavor is what guides most of these tracks, thanks to the dobro's overpowering sound. Iconic gospel standard "This Little Light of Mine" opens the record and introduces the collaboration perfectly, with Hall and Collier trading off searing, soaring solos and percussive picking on their respective instruments. "Power in the Blood" also nods to Collier's church background, while "Rosebud" sees the pedal-steel player falling back into an understated but inspired rhythmic accompaniment. A cover of the Dead's "Crazy Fingers" shows the duo's laid-back side, while "The Darkest Hour" sees them dig deep, with Hall's thick strumming underlying Collier's ripping, melancholic solos. And just to add an extra flavor of slide to the project, Greensky Bluegrass dobroist **Anders Beck** makes an appearance on the bluesy, rollicking final track, "Colfax Boogie." ***Matt Inman***

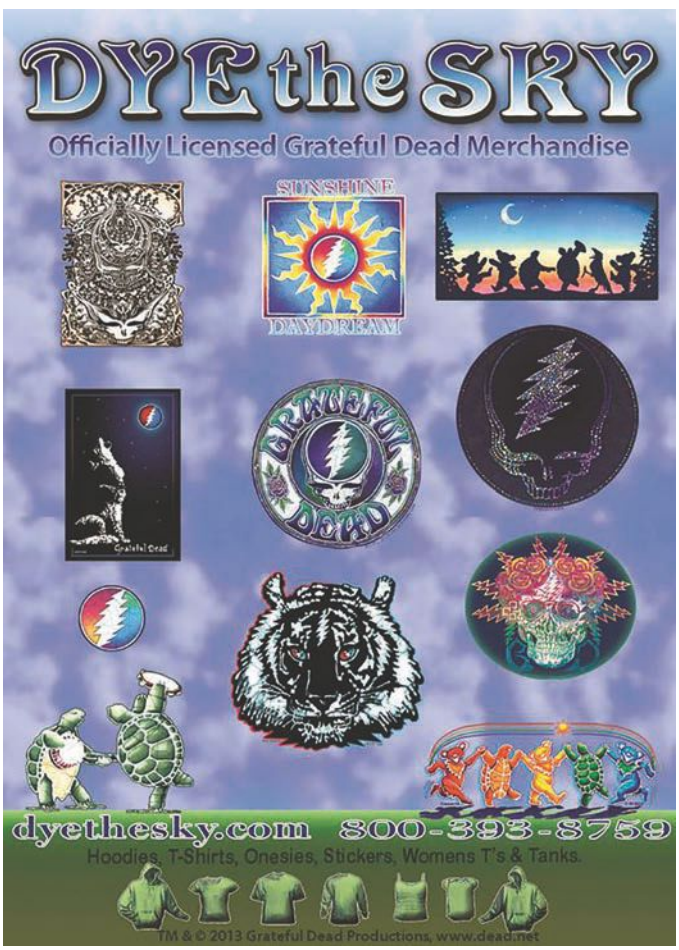
Mutemath

OFF THE TRACKS

Aliya Cycon Project

Prayer SELF-RELEASED

Aliya Cycon came to New York City to become a professional ballerina, but quickly turned her career aspirations to music and relocated to Boston's Berklee College of Music. A visit to the West Bank ignited Cycon's passion for Middle Eastern music, which led to her adopting the oud—a stringed, lute-like instrument used in the Arabic music tradition—as her primary means of expression and becoming the first female oud player to graduate from Berklee. With her seven-piece **Project**, Cycon delivers a new album *Prayer*, which sounds like the soundtrack to an epic theatrical journey, invoking the spirit of Middle Eastern music while incorporating jazzy rhythms helped by the band's multi-instrumental attack. Songs like "Heartbeat" and the title track showcase both Cycon's virtuosic oud playing and her skill in crafting engaging melodies and movements, while her gentle vocals lead the way on the triumphant "Motherland" and "House on the Stone." "Elias," in particular, may hint at Cycon's background in dance—its exotic melody and relentless beat evoke a whirling performance playing out in the minds of both artist and audience. ***Matt Inman***



PLUNDERING THE VAULTS

Neil Young

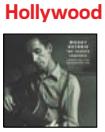
Hitchhiker REPRISE

Neil Young has recorded so much that he can afford to throw away entire albums and just make another one instead. That's what happened in 1976: Young cut a 10-track, all-acoustic set, produced by **David Briggs**, in one session, then tossed it aside. Now it's been released as *Hitchhiker*, and if some of the titles sound familiar that's because Young later placed different versions—some only slightly altered, others more significantly reworked—on other albums. The stripped-down "Pocahontas," "Powderfinger" and "Ride My Llama," all of which landed on 1979's *Rust Never Sleeps*, are simply strummed, demo-like tunes here, emitting a markedly gentler vibe than the familiar Crazy Horse-backed versions. The title track didn't find a home until 2010's *Le Noise*; "Campaigner" found its way onto the *Decade* compilation, "Captain Kennedy" was issued on *Hawks & Doves* and "Human Highway" appeared on *Comes a Time*. What these earlier versions reveal is that, for Young, a song is nearly always a work-in-progress, there for the reshaping as the whim strikes. And some maybe aren't meant to be at all: Two of the tracks on *Hitchhiker*, "Hawaii" and "Give Me Strength," have never made it to an official Young album before. (Although, he performed the latter live for a while.) Neither is particularly memorable but that doesn't mean they aren't any good, either, only that Neil Young is so busy looking for the next song that he sometimes loses track of the ones he's already written.

Jeff Tamarkin

Various Artists

Woody Guthrie—The Tribute Concerts: Carnegie Hall 1968 · Hollywood Bowl 1970 BEAR FAMILY



The passing of Woody Guthrie in October 1967, just as the great folk revival of the early '60s gave way to the rock revolution, left an enormous gap in the American music landscape—there wasn't a singer-songwriter out there who didn't acknowledge Guthrie's influence. Many of the greatest, both from his own generation and those that followed, came together to pay their respects at multi-artist events held in New York in 1968 and LA two years later. Germany's Bear Family Records has assembled all of the music from those shows, most of which was released on a pair of 1972 albums, now augmented by some 20 previously unreleased tracks. They've also included a number of interviews, with artists such as **Judy Collins**, **Phil Ochs**, **Pete Seeger** and Woody's son **Arlo Guthrie**. Taken as a whole, the collection is both a respectable homage to Guthrie and a reminder of just how vital the folk singer-songwriter scene was, even if it had been overshadowed by recent developments in rock. Disc one, the Carnegie show, gets by on star power, with early appearances by Arlo, Judy Collins (a lovely "So Long, it's Been Good to Know Yuh"), **Richie Havens**, **Odetta**, **Pete Seeger** and others, but it's not until well into the show, with a three-song set by the then-reclusive **Bob Dylan** (backed by members of The Band), that the enormity of the honoree is truly established. The second disc, and much of the third, switches the locale to Hollywood. Many of the same artists reprise their roles. (Havens' "Nine Hundred Miles" is a highlight.) And while there's no Dylan, **Joan Baez**'s interpretations of Guthrie standards like "Plane Wreck at Los Gatos" and "Pastures of Plenty" are jewels, and the presence of Guthrie contemporary **Ramblin' Jack Elliott** puts a stamp of authenticity on the proceedings. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Various Artists

Treasure of the Broken Land - The Songs of Mark Heard

STORM WEATHERED

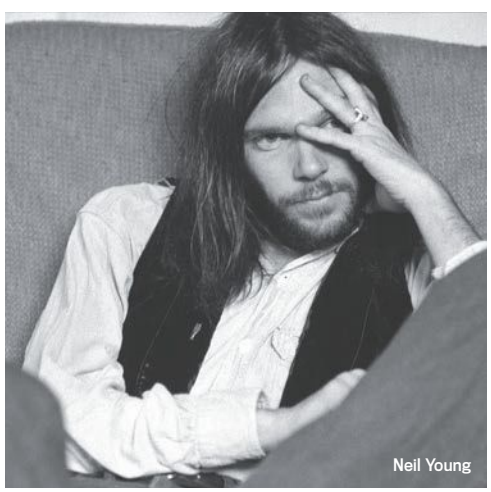
The late, great **Mark Heard** didn't live long enough to attain the wider acclaim that his early devotees believe he deserved. Yet even though his career ended far too soon, he did manage to gain a respectable following among many of his fellow artists, several of whom pay him tribute here. To be sure, this isn't the first album that offers Heard a well-deserved homage—*Strong Hand of Love* (later expanded and released as *Orphans of God*) initiated interest 25 years ago, shortly after Heard's passing in 1992 due to cardiac arrest. Sadly, that earlier effort didn't exactly make the cash registers ring, and whether this new release fares any better remains to be seen. A singer-songwriter admired for his credence and conviction, Heard's music continues to resonate with obvious emotional appeal. That's especially apparent here, as evidenced by the series of stirring performances from the impressive list of contributors—**Rodney Crowell**, The Black Lillies' **Cruz Contreras**, **Amy Speace**, **Drew Holcomb**, **North Mississippi Allstars** and **Over the Rhine** chief among them. Still, while those names add to the marquee value of the album, it's the songs themselves that shine above all else. **Matt Haeck**'s jaunty take on "The Dry Bones Dance," **Lily & Madeleine**'s heartfelt rendition of "What Kind of Friend," the soulful sway of **Buddy Miller**'s "Treasure of the Broken Land," plus **Humming People**'s "Nobody's Looking" and **Birds of Chicago**'s "Rise From the Ruins," all attest to Heard's profound sentiment and spirituality. Produced by **Phil Madeira**, the album will hopefully lead listeners to seek out Heard's original recordings, which best exemplify the man's insight and intent.

Lee Zimmerman

Frank Zappa & the Mothers of Invention

Absolutely Free ZAPPA/UME

Right out of the gate, with 1966's double-LP *Freak Out!*, **Mothers of Invention** proved to be one of the most audacious, inventive ensembles in rock music. (**Frank Zappa**'s name was not appended to the band's until the early-'70s.) *Absolutely Free*, the '67 follow-up, took the original concept a step further, ramping up the political/social commentary and satire of the debut on tracks like "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," "Plastic People" and "America Drinks and Goes Home," and going all out on musical experimentation. With the addition of keyboardist **Don Preston**, woodwinds player **Bunk Gardner** and drummer **Billy Mundi** (guitarist **Jim Fielder** also contributed, but was not credited), Zappa was able to widen his scope considerably. And he utilized every tool in his box to concoct a series of interconnected tracks that tore into the fabric of American society—particularly that of suburbia and high-school culture—always with tongue planted deeply in cheek. The reissue, on vinyl only, expands the original single-LP by one side (the fourth doesn't contain any music), mostly aimed—as is often the case with this sort of thing—toward completists, who might find the radio ads, radio remixes (from 1969) and bonus tracks "Why Don'tcha Do Me Right" and "Big Leg Emma" worth the investment. Equally enticing is the libretto that Zappa created for the set, including line-by-line lyrical notation that makes it easier to discern what exactly is being sung in some of the more chaotic sections, and which group member is singing it. *Jeff Tamarkin*



Neil Young

Gary Burden

Jethro Tull

***Songs From the Wood*—40th Anniversary Edition** RHINO

Some prefer the people-pleasing *Aqualung*, highlighted by its handful of hard-charging hits. For others, they peaked with *Thick as a Brick*, a progressive-rock satire that nonetheless defined the genre. But in a song-by-song breakdown, **Jethro Tull** never improved beyond their 10th LP, 1977's *Songs From the Wood*, a tour-de-force that melded traditional folk with symphonic prog. The sextet line-up—frontman/chief songwriter **Ian Anderson**, guitarist **Martin Barre**, bassist **John Glascock**, drummer **Barrie Barlow**, keyboardists **John Evan** and **David Palmer**—effortlessly knock out nine tracks that run the gamut from breezy sing-alongs ("Cup of Wonder") to galloping, rhythmically tricky workouts ("Velvet Green"). For the latest installment of Tull's ongoing 40th anniversary series, **Steven Wilson** offers a subtly modernized remix as evidenced by the epic title track's billowing choral harmonies and Barlow's echoing toms in the outro of the wintry "Ring Out, Solstice Bells." The essential selling point is the glut of bonus material including a previously unissued, two-disc live set recorded at two *Songs from the Wood* U.S. shows, remixed by King Crimson's **Jakko Jakszyk**. (Anderson, known for his *Monty Python*-esque stage banter, was in a particularly saucy mood throughout these shows, poking fun at the "typical folk-myth bullshit" that inspired "Jack-in-the-Green.") But the biggest treats are two unheard studio cuts, most notably the folk-prog masterclass "Old Aces Die Hard," which spills over with spacey synth solos and intricate bass riffs. How the hell did this one linger in the vault for so long?

Ryan Reed

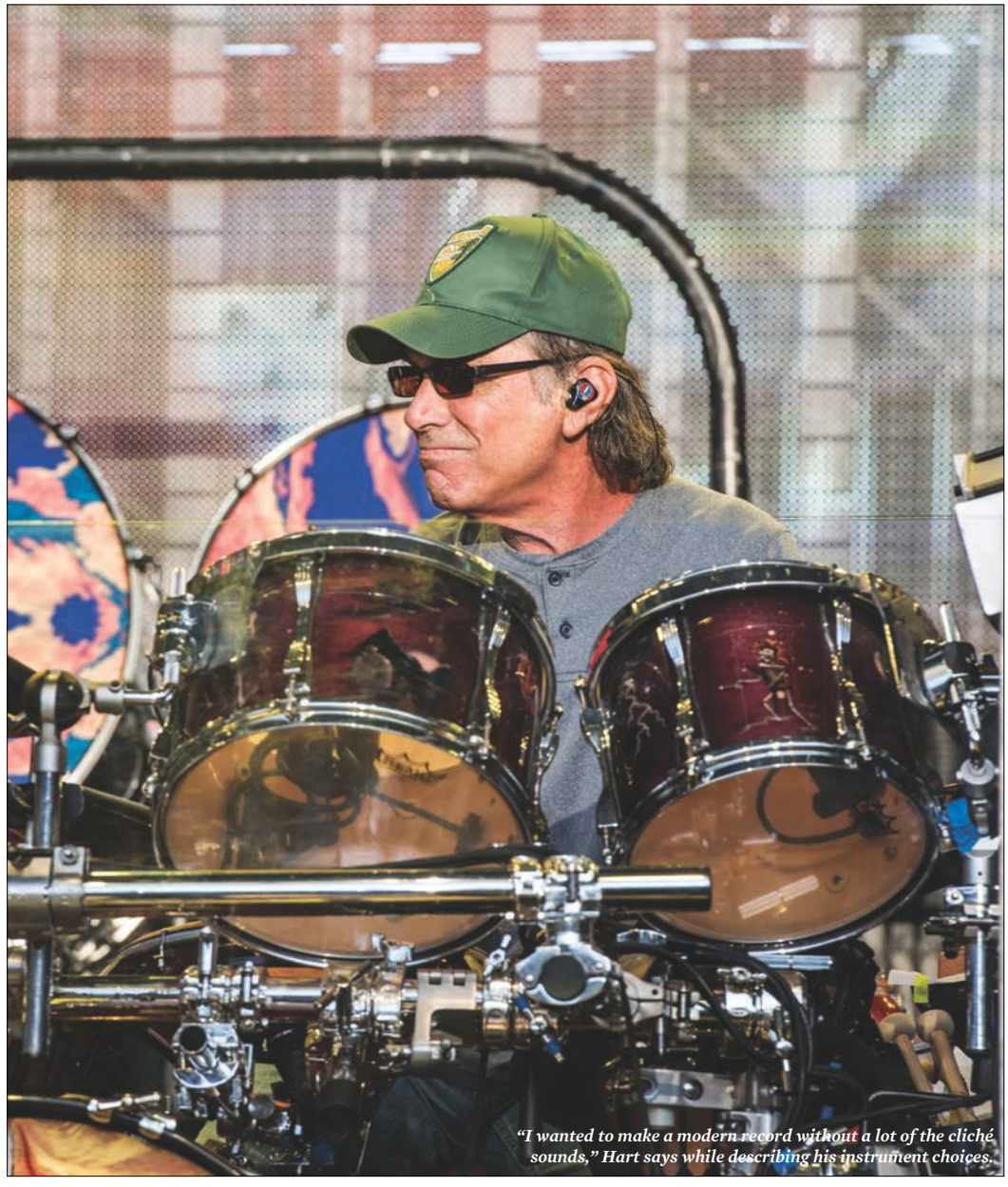
were easy to work with, and they were hungry. They really wanted this. And I let them fly as far as I could take them, as far as they wanted to go. We went to places I've never been before. Every day became an exciting vocal experience.

[Pretty Lights producer Michal Menert] also moved up this way. He was living in Colorado and needed a break. I'd heard Pretty Lights, and Michal and I just gelled well. He helped in the arranging and recording because of his expertise in Ableton Live. That's really one of the big electronic helpers in composition—someone who could use that as an instrument and whip it around and have fun with it. He was a very important player in all of this, and he devoted almost a year of his time. We worked very closely on it together and took it to the finish line.

GREASED LIGHTNING

Oteil [Burbridge] is a master groovist. He's a virtuoso player, totally in charge of his instrument on every level. You'd think somebody with that much technique would be able to do anything, yet he goes for the groove. He has this fantastic ability to play things that are out of the range of 99.9 percent of bass players. His hands are like greased lightning. His fingers move at a blinding speed, and yet he's able to maintain the groove-solid. So he has all the embellishments you could want, while creating a deep pocket, which is the basis for the whole record. He just happened to show up at the studio, and I said, "Hey, Oteil, why don't you try this?" I was mostly using my monochord, what they call "the beam," as a bass.

I wanted to make a modern record without a lot of the cliché sounds: no keyboards, no cowbell, not very many tom-toms, and really no guitar—except for Steve Kimock, who is on a couple of tracks. That was one of the marching orders when I first started: I wanted to make new music with new instruments. Many of the sounds are homemade, homebrewed. They were born and raised here. They didn't come from a Japanese machine, or somewhere from China. But there were a few songs where I just wasn't satisfied with what I was getting on the beam. It was one of those serendipitous moments when Oteil came in at the end. Oteil's my bandmate, and I know what he does. So he just folded right into the music.



"I wanted to make a modern record without a lot of the cliché sounds," Hart says while describing his instrument choices.

Jay Blakesberg

THE MUSIC NEVER STOPPED

As [Dead & Company] go along, we pick up new songs for John [Mayer] to learn—and for Oteil—but mostly John. It's a giant learning process for him. We bring old stuff in and make it new, and it sounds different with John and Oteil than it did with our former bandmates. There's still a lot to be said in this music. We've revamped the Rhythm Devils sections [on this upcoming tour]. It's a new roller-coaster ride with new sounds and new ideas. The band seems to be humming. It feels good; everybody's happy and everybody seems to be smiling.

We're going to keep the tempos up when we can, and we're going to play our hearts out. That's the bottom line here: Making sure that we're up to speed, so to speak, playing the songs at the right tempo. And we play them all in different ways: The songs can sound good slow or sound good fast, sound good loud or sound good quiet. We're experimenting with quiet now. After years of ridiculous volumes, now we're learning the soft side. And I like it. We want to be well-versed on everything—to go slow and fast, play loud and soft. So dynamics are a big part of this band. The Grateful Dead could be quiet as a mouse and then explode like a lion.

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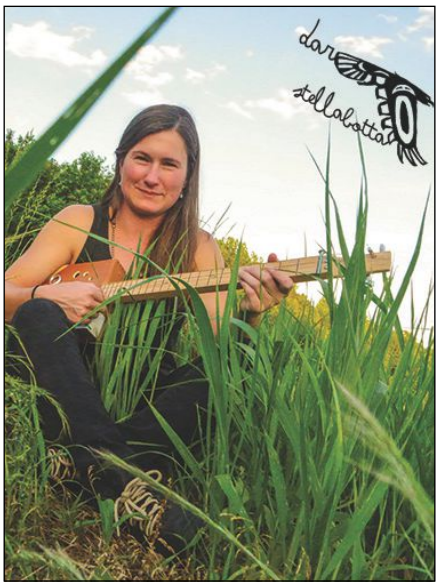
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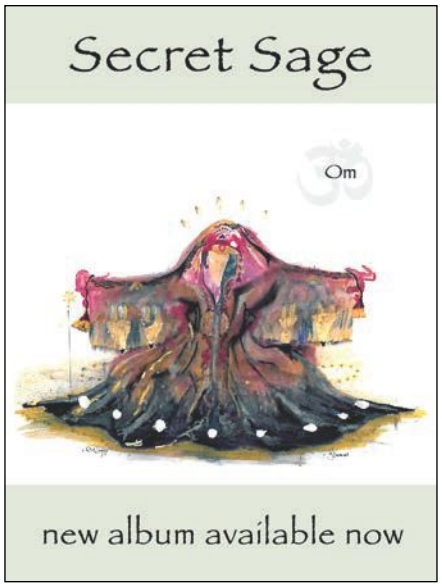
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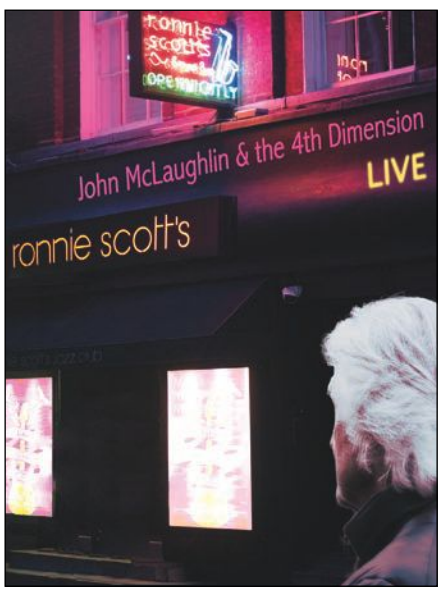
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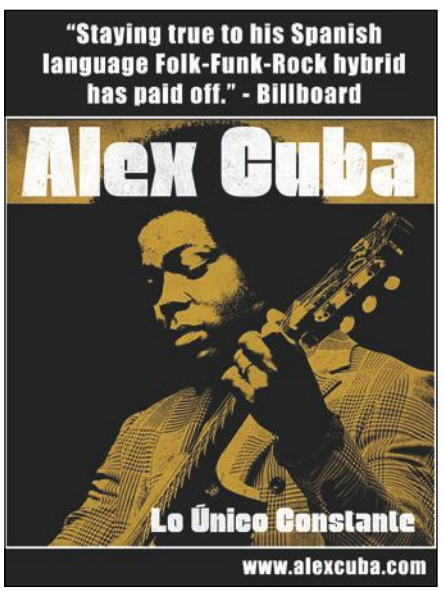
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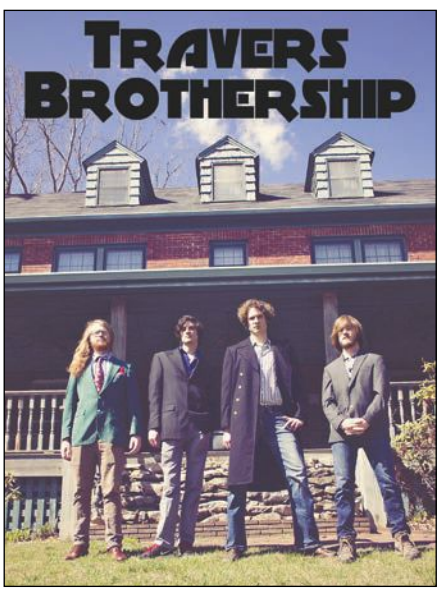
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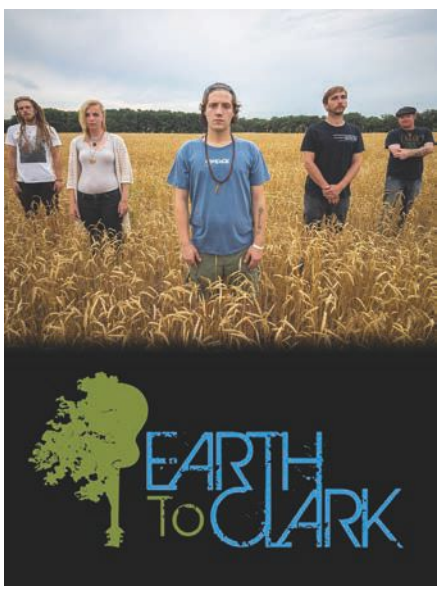
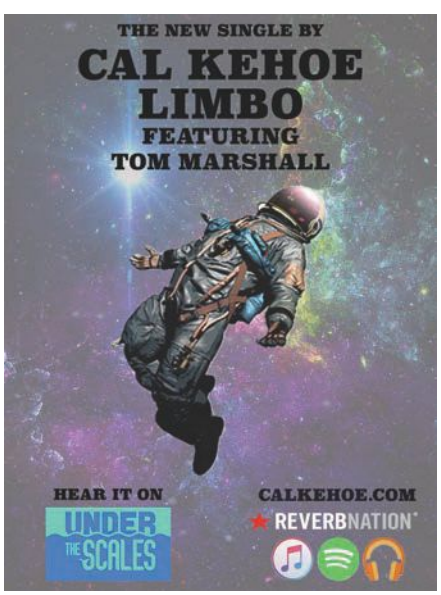




like synthesizers or trippy guitar and a lot of that is the harp. She went deep with the sonic possibilities of the harp and emerged with a setup that allowed her to be a lot louder and sustain her sound—that was the big thing because the harp dies out quickly. She made a lot of discoveries, and I would say she's the MVP of the record. It's been her personal mission to open up the possibilities for the harp.

HIDEOUS GLORIOUS

On "Hideous Glorious," we used the same approach as "Queens of the Breakers"—we recorded as an acoustic band and then overdubbed as an electric band. It's one of those tunes that felt good, but I also thought that, if we were going to leave a song off the record because the record felt too long, this probably would have been the first one we'd cut. It sits in a funny place. It's at odds with what I had thought made The Barr Brothers a unique band—it's got that meat-and-potatoes, rock-and-roll thing—but it's another one that feels really good to play. It's got an openness to it. I love the drum sounds on it, the parts are all well laid out and it just kind of fell together. It was another one where I was like, "Well, OK, we *can* play more anthemic, epic rock-and-roll that I thought was maybe off-limits to us."

READY FOR WAR

"Ready for War" is another one I'd been kicking around for at least five years. I'd given up on it ever being on a record, or even just being finished compositionally. There was a point in [making] this record where Andrew felt it needed "one of those heart songs." We had "Queens of the Breakers," "Kompromat" and "Maybe Someday," and these things that were either a bit more rocking or a bit more mysterious, but he felt we were missing that "heart song." Then he was like, "What about that song you've been writing for a little while called 'Ready for War?' What do you think about that?"

So I took it back to the drawing board and penned it out. I felt like there was still a lot to be discovered in this song, and then we came up with this cool little time shift. The entrance of the drums felt kind of undeniable to us as a moment. And lyrically, it was really impressionistic for me. It was way less concrete than anything else on the record and I'm OK with that. I like having a couple of those songs on the record, where I listen a few years down the road and I'm like, "Oh, maybe that's what this one is about." It's something open-ended to discover later.

After receiving funding, the band opted to release *PLUMP* in two parts. *Chapter 1* came out in December 2015, with the second disc following this past April, as the group opted to take some time and re-enter the studio, scrapping some earlier sessions in order to release another timely statement in its own right.

"Our new conscious lyric style was all over *Chapter One*," Savoulidis attests. "When the band first started out, we were focused on writing instrumental pieces of music that were diverse in genre and style, with a focus on improvisation. As far as the lyrics went, I was just making up characters and writing fun stories to go along with them. But now, I find myself writing more introspectively. Really, it's just a message of positivity, that love is a powerful thing. It became more about writing personal stuff about my life that seemed to mean more to this beautiful community of people that we all relate to—growing up, getting older and dealing with life, day by day. Whereas, when I started, it was more silly."

As he describes the evolution of his lyrics, it parallels the development of another Burlington-based act. This is why it's ironic that—even as Twiddle increasingly connects with a swelling audience while delivering tales of empathy and respect—the band is sometimes criticized for its goofy name and occasional cartoonish lyrics by fans of another band that was once criticized for its goofy name and occasional cartoonish lyrics.

Twiddle is aware of this and, while it must be frustrating, Savoulidis suggests that the group has come to terms with it. "There are times when it feels like we're the band everyone loves to hate. I understand both sides of it. I was a music fan, I get it. We never ever expect everyone to like our music. While I have a respect for every kind of music, that doesn't mean I like it all.

"Everybody is welcome to their opinion, although sometimes I get the sense that there are people out there who are vocal about not liking us, who have never really listened to us. They might not like our name or the way that we look or the fact that we're from Vermont or Burlington and that we're a four piece. We're used to it, although I have met a lot of people in the last year who said, 'Hey man, I wasn't really on board until I saw a show and you converted me.' So I would say to everybody out there who thinks they hate us: 'Come see us live. If you really don't like it, that's OK. We appreciate you coming to check it out.' Everybody has an opinion. It's all good."

wisdom. "What matters is the stuff that's really important—don't fuck up your marriage. Bob [Weir]'s spent more time onstage probably than I've been alive, and he leads by example—there's no reason to feel anxiety about being watched. The anxiety should be more of a positive anxiety, like focusing on what's happening in the moment."

He sits back in his chair and smiles, adding, "Bob doesn't like it when things speed up, so he always says that if you're ever feeling that, just stop and breathe. And, honestly, sometimes I'll be up on the stage and take a deep breath and not even think. It totally works, and I just enjoy the whole freedom to do whatever I want. We've played a lot of shows, but a lot of times, we're trying to *recreate* something, rather than create something. And Bob is like, 'They've heard the record. Let's play it this way.'"

"Trouble Will Find Me was the first record that we really enjoyed making—it was never anxiety-ridden, like, 'Oh, we're going to fail,'" Aaron says. "And then, this time, we just felt liberated. Making this insane Grateful Dead tribute, you just realize the different periods of the Dead and how much freedom they had, with experimentalism at the core of it—and also, playing with Bob Weir, where nothing is ever the same. So, it was a little more haphazard. It was totally OK for me to make an entirely electronic demo in my hotel room and send it to Matt or Bryce to mess with."

The more chilled-out Devendorfs ran with that feeling too. Instead of always worrying about sticking to tightly woven arrangements, Bryan would often improvise in the studio. Matt is even more candid about their new approach: "It was a lot of new toys, but it was also realizing that it was so unclear to us, anyway, what our sound was or what our signature was or what our wheelhouse was. And none of us would agree on it anyway. So then it was like, 'Why not add more colors to the swirl and see what that looks like?'"

"Not having a deadline really alleviated a lot of pressure for me, personally, and for Aaron, too," Bryan says. "Most of our records have come in a creatively contentious way. [This time], we haven't been fighting or nervous about our careers or striking while the iron is hot. All that shit used to add unnecessary stress; it was hard. So, on the last two records, we just said, 'Fuck it. Someday, maybe we'll put out another record.' That has been the healthiest, most creative catalyst for us. In the past, we've gotten into all of these corners over totally unnecessary choices that didn't need to be made. And so, we got ourselves out of those corners."

Lyrically, Matt, who is aware that he now has an audio scrapbook of his life and relationship woes, spends much of the new record diving into his own midlife questions—from losing parents to the need to ghost instead of engaging in a long conversation. His wife Carin—a former *New Yorker* editor—has served as his muse and occasional writing accomplice for years. (He's often used the character Karen as her lyrical stand-in in songs.) On *Sleep Well Beast*, she takes on an even bigger role, co-writing all the album's lyrics and working through their own marriage issues in public on "Carin at the Liquor Store," which recounts the unraveling of a fictional relationship. Instead of his trademark screams and sermons, Matt's voice has also aged into more of a mid-range, expressive instrument.

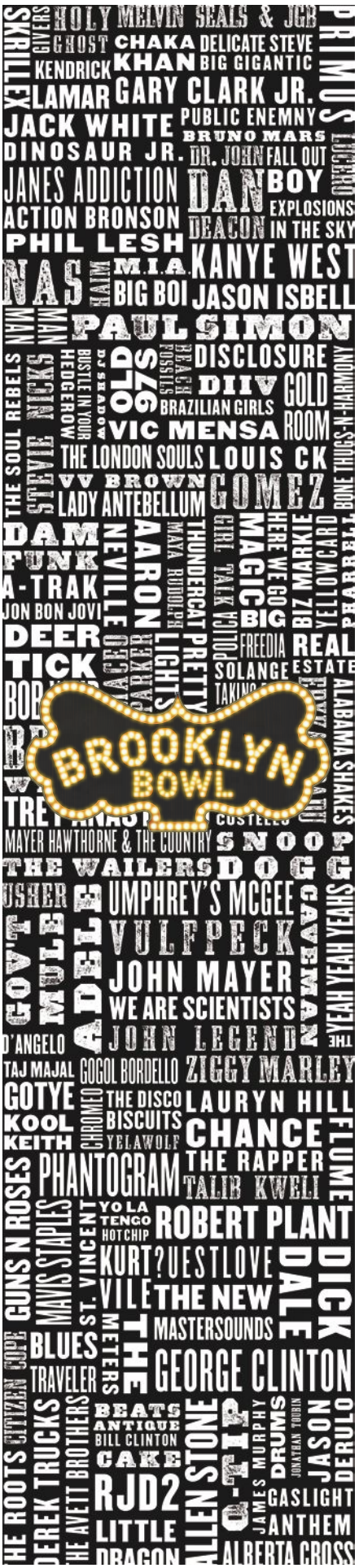
Aaron sees his new studio as a key part of The National's future. In addition to working with the band and recording other acts, he hopes to use the sanctuary-like building as his sonic laboratory. "We fell in love with these churches while working on *Day of the Dead* because of how the rooms sound," he says. "So, we built [our studio] with the dimensions of a small church. That was an important influence, as far as getting out of the garage and wanting a space where we could actually play comfortably together."

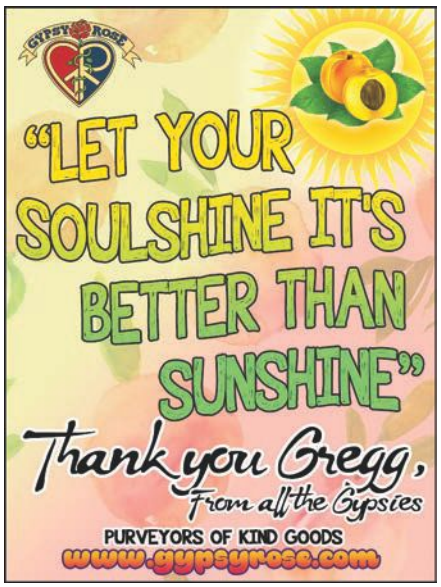
He thinks back to the band's early days recording in Brooklyn. "We made *Alligator* in my sister's attic and *Boxer* in my attic—these tiny spaces, where we would record the guitars in the closet. Now, we finally have a place that's ideal for how The National needs to work. It sounds simple, but we actually never had that." (Matt, Scott and Bryan all agree that Aaron may, ultimately, have some Levon Helm-like aspirations for his new audio playground.)

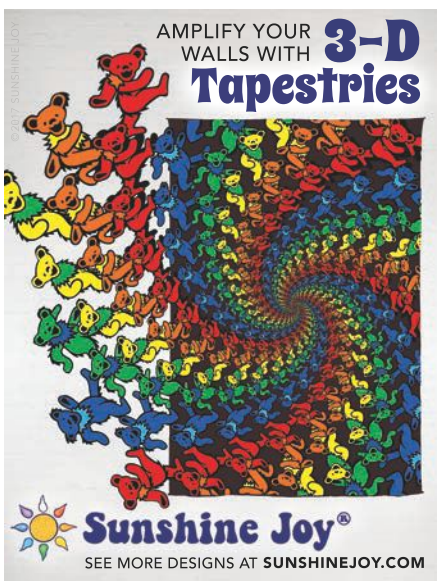
Perhaps because they have seen so many musical scenes come and go, the members of The National are still a nostalgic bunch. Before *Trouble Will Find Me*, they returned to Mercury Lounge—where talent buyer/booker Johnny Beach provided them with their first big break after blindly listening to their CD—for an underplay. This time, they packed into the venue's sister club, The Bowery Ballroom, for the first time in a decade.

And, Matt knows that sometimes the bands that last the longest change the most over time.

"It's like the Bee Gees—they started as one kind of band, and then they became uncool," he says. "And then, because someone asked them to write some songs for a disco movie, they redefined their whole musical idea. So, we're the Bee Gees of depressing music—without the disco."







ocean for a long time. And the scarier thing is, when you move the plastic off the top of the sand, and you take a scoop, it's really colorful because these little pieces of plastic have broken down to a level where they're just becoming part of the makeup of the sand.

The more I traveled, and the more I started looking at windward-facing beaches around the world, I could see that same problem in a lot of places. So it was interesting to travel out with these experts from the 5 Gyres [a nonprofit focusing on reducing plastics pollution], who do a lot of the data collection out in the middle of the ocean, where these gyres gather and the debris collects. It was interesting and exciting to learn about something—to get to play the role of the citizen scientist and go out there in the middle of the ocean, and yet, we were learning a lot of depressing facts that this group has been finding for a long time. They always say hatred comes from fear of what you don't know, so at least you start to understand.

The film is equally striking and alarming in many ways. What would you encourage people to do to attempt to mitigate this?

The first step is cutting single-use plastic out of our lives. There's a great movie called *Bag It* that talks about how plastic is a very amazing material. It's so strong and light, and basically lasts forever. And so there are certain things that should be made out of plastic. But for all of these things that we're using for a moment and then tossing away, there is no "away." Plastic lasts.

We need to try and eliminate as many of those things as we can—simple things like straws and bags and water bottles. It's hard to find anything that's not wrapped in plastic. It's about trying to get your produce from local farmers markets that don't require much packaging, and then legislation is important to look at. In Hawaii, we've banned plastic bags and it's been interesting to watch the shift. People might not realize it, but plastic is relatively new and something we've become attached to in a short period of time. We can unattach ourselves to it as well.

In terms of this album, you wrote an introductory letter in which you mention the president and the North Atlantic Gyre. What would you like the listener to take away from the record?

I've always found that it's a balance between sharing things that are personal and trying to translate them into a form where they feel broad enough that someone could apply them to their own life. I'm not trying to make it into a reality TV show, with all of my feelings totally exposed and I'm completely vulnerable, but there has to be vulnerability involved. Then, ultimately, once I decide to share them, I'm deciding that they're not just mine anymore. I'm putting them out to the whole world.

So I always find it interesting just to see who connects with which songs, and how people interpret the songs. Sometimes I like the way people interpret them more than what I intended them to be. [*Laughs.*] So I don't know if I ever have any one thing that I'm hoping for. I always hope that every record I put out will be somebody's favorite record.

I always try to write from a place that's true to where I'm at in my life, and if that appeals to somebody, then that's great. The one thing I try not to do is stay forever young, in the sense of trying to write songs for younger people. I just hope that the human connection can apply to somebody who is younger because they feel the same way. I just want to write from where I'm at in my life. I'm a 42-year-old guy that has three kids, and these are the experiences that I have. So, I'm not sure what I hope people get out of it. I just like to share the songs, and I hope they make people feel good.

These are tumultuous times, in a lot of respects, for many different people. Did that push you to either say, "I want to address this," or "I want to be able to take people away from that?"

It's funny, I didn't mean for it to be this way, but when I listen to the sequence, to me, Side A is sort of political and social commentary—what's happening in the world right now. And then Side B is like driving away from that. Literally, the first song on Side B is a song about driving up the coast going camping. And it's meant to be an effort of trying to find freedom between these lines—the lines of society. So the second half becomes a little more personal. There's a love song on there, there's a song about camping, there's a song about the trip I did on the sailboat and all those kinds of things.

I hope that if someone wants to escape, they'll just put on Side B. [*Laughs.*] But it also felt really good to sing out on that song, "My Mind Is for Sale." I've had so many strong responses to the song, both positive and negative, even from old friends. So I'm glad I wrote that song. It feels like it was important to at least touch on that stuff. But it's also important to remind ourselves that it's a beautiful world, and that even when it feels like it's falling apart sometimes, there's still a lot to appreciate.

"more meaningful signings" at the label, adding, "I was struck by the beauty and ambition of the music he was making."]

It's not quite the same situation today, but it was a different world in the very early-'70s, wasn't it? I think "Lucky" is my middle name.

Since the music had all those antecedents that you describe, Mahavishnu Orchestra opened up for a range of artists during those early tours, including the Allman Brothers Band, who Jimmy toured with for a short stretch. John, you became friendly with Duane Allman, but you never actually played with him.

JOHN: No, we never played together. What a beautiful man he was. What a sweetheart he was. And could he play. Oh, my, that slide guitar. We never played together, but we did gig together. Mahavishnu would open for them.

We opened for a lot of different people. We opened for the Allman Brothers a number of times. We opened for Blue Öyster Cult. We opened for James Taylor. Who opened for us? God bless him forever, George Carlin. That was a trip. We'd be on the side of the stage. His loss was such a tragedy, but we've lost a lot of people from that time. We lost Jimi—that was terrible. There was also Janis Joplin, but I've got George on my iPod—I still listen to him regularly.

Jimmy, do you see any common reference points between Mahavishnu Orchestra and the music of the Allman Brothers?

JIMMY: One similarity would be total dedication, openness and willingness to go into the unknown with those improvisations. Mahavishnu was pulling from more sophisticated areas of jazz and Indian classical music, but another thing would be that the Allman Brothers had two guitar players who would sometimes play lines together. Sometimes they'd play in unison, and sometimes they'd harmonize the line. And Mahavishnu did the same thing, but they did it with violin, and when I hear two people playing a line together, it really grabs me.

JOHN: That's the real jazz tradition, Jimmy, isn't it? I grew up with that, whether it was Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, or Miles with Trane, or Miles with Cannonball Adderley or Miles with Wayne [Shorter]. It's that thing—it's that unison, sometimes harmony, sometimes unison—it's that thing. You're absolutely right; it's got a thing. But that, for me, goes back to the old jazz traditions, so there's no way I can get away from that.

And you and I have talked about this: We're gonna be playing lines together, sometimes harmonies. But I want to hear that sound, that unison harmony. For me, that's a jazz tradition of playing because it's an art to play the melody with somebody. To play a solo is one thing. But to play with somebody, that's what's beautiful about the collective. Because, yeah, we can all have individual experiences of liberation sometimes when we're playing solos. But you can have a collective experience of playing together—playing lines together, playing harmonies together. This collective experience is very important to me, and I feel that it's part of the jazz tradition too. So whatever people call the music, we're all bringing our own traditions up-to-date because they're part of what we are and how we play.

JIMMY: Absolutely. To me, it was—and it still is—church. It brings people together; it's the collective John's talking about. I think there are a couple of similarities between the Allman Brothers and Mahavishnu. And then the Dixie Dregs were huge Mahavishnu fans. The violin and the guitar were such a unique voice, and I'd never heard it before. Sure, you hear two guitars, or you hear an organ and a guitar, or you hear trumpet and saxophone, or any other kind of combination. But a violin and a guitar? You had Django [Reinhardt] and Stéphane Grappelli, but in a rock context, John, what you and Jerry [Goodman] did together, that may have been the first pairing on that electrifying level.

JOHN: Yes, with that fusion level. But you know what it is? The Allman Brothers—they had a vibe, they had the spirit. When I go see a band, if that thing isn't there, I know it and I'm really not interested. I have to feel that vibe, and that's what I call the spirit. It's undefinable, but when it's not there, I really miss it. And the Allman Brothers, God bless them all. They had their thing and Duane was a killer; he was wonderful. And that's it.

There are so many different bands and different genres now. But in the end, does a band have that thing? It can be rock, it can be jazz, it can be a lot of things—but does it have it? The Beatles had it, Sly & the Family Stone had it. One of the greatest experiences I ever had was seeing Sly in 1969 at the Monterey Jazz. I was in the audience dancing my ass off. Unbelievable. One of the greatest concerts I ever went to. And they were not playing jazz, but who cares? What's jazz? We're looking for freedom, we're looking for the experience, the liberation. And hopefully, in a collective manner along with the audience, who can never really be underestimated because once that thing is there, they know it. Everybody knows what that thing is, even though they don't have a name for it. And they know if that thing isn't there.

JIMMY: They do know. They can tell if somebody is faking it.

JOHN: Hashtag *fake*! Hashtag *fake jazz*. [*Laughs*.] Listen, jazz has suffered a lot. Some of the smooth jazz, funky jazz, cool jazz, it's shallow—it's not even an inch deep. It's full of clichés, and jazz is about getting some blood on the stage. That's true of rock-and-roll, too. It's got to have depth to it. It's a total thing in music.

But the way the world is at the moment, if you go into a café, they might be playing some jazz in the background, but it's not disturbing. It's just wallpaper. A computer can create that kind of music. It's got nothing to do with real music. But you hear it everywhere. Even in classical music, you hear it. And in a way, it's not sincere. It's missing that thing we live for.

You mentioned audience reactions, and we're currently in a period of anxiety and acrimony. When you perform, is it your aspiration to elevate and maybe take people away, or do you think an artist should speak directly to the politics or social conditions of the day?

JOHN: Personally, I don't take into consideration what the audience may want because, as a man and as a musician, when I go onstage, the only thing I speak about is my life. And the thing is: How deep do I express it? How eloquently do I express it? And with how much love do I express it—the love that I have for music, for myself, for the people around me and for the world at large?

That's all I really have. That's all any musician has. He goes to the stage and he tells the story of his life and how he really feels about what's going on with himself and around the world. I think everybody picks up on that. So I don't worry about what people want to hear because, in the end, they want to hear a story. They want to feel the story—they want to feel how deeply you care about what you're doing, and about how you're playing and about the love that's in the band. And really, that's it.

I don't worry about what the public will want because what I want when I go to a concert is: I want to feel that person's life and how deeply they feel about what they're doing because that will come through the music and that's what will take me away.

JIMMY: That's it for me, too. I think people wanna hear a story, but also, as an improviser, you go out there and you don't have it preconceived, what you're gonna do. All I can hope for is that I can get out of my own way. I pray that I can open up enough and not just string licks together.

JOHN: We go onstage and our trousers are down by the end. We just hope everything's gonna be OK.

MICHAEL McDONALD

By MIKE GREENHAUS

MICHAEL MCDONALD isn't afraid to have some fun with his Yacht-Rock persona. So when current soul-jazz sensation Stephen "Thundercat" Bruner—best known for his work with Flying Lotus, Kendrick Lamar, Kamasi Washington and Erykah Badu—half-joked that he'd love to be stuck on a desert island with McDonald and his contemporary Kenny Loggins, the 65-year-old singer took the off-the-cuff comment as a rallying call.

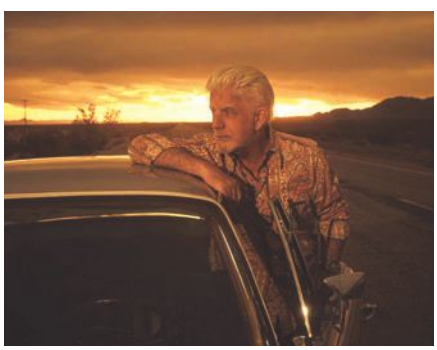
"Kenny's kids [read] an article where Steve had mentioned us as influences in his music and writing," says McDonald, who made his name through his work with Steely Dan, the Doobie Brothers and his own hits before the 33-year-old bassist was even born. "We all got into a studio and focused on 'Show You the Way,' and I'm hoping we get the chance to write with him again."

McDonald's unexpected hipster cred has placed him back in the public eye and even scored the '80s star a cameo at Coachella. The recent surge of interest also spilled over into *Wide Open*—his first record in almost a decade and first set of original material following three albums of R&B and gospel covers for Motown. *Wide Open* boasts a slew of guests from the roots and improvisational worlds as well, including Warren Haynes, Branford Marsalis, Robben Ford and Marcus Miller.

"At this point in time, I don't really have any illusions about competing with all the acts out there filling up the airwaves," he says. "There are so many more musicians vying for that small space than when I was with bands in the '70s. Going from playing these classic Top-40 hits was a weird transition—I had to readjust my dials and do a record that's a little more introspective. I make records with a little more of an open horizon these days."

It's been 17 years since you released an album of original material. What got your creative juices flowing again?

When I moved down to Nashville, it was always in pursuit of broadening my bases as a songwriter to something beyond the band I was in at the time. I was always demoing stuff and convincing my producer/co-producer



Shannon Forrest to let me buy him dinner in exchange for co-opting some studio time after hours. Even though the Motown period was an active touring time for me, I had to put down these ideas, mostly so I wouldn't forget them. Shannon recently moved into a new studio and I went over to visit—he pulled out these files that we had been doing all that time and said, "I couldn't help but think we have an album started here."

Given that these songs were written over an extended period of time while you were working on a slew of R&B and gospel tracks, do you think they hang together lyrically?

I always operate with the belief that what I come up with from my subconscious, or accidentally, is always going to be better than what I think about too much. I have a way of rationalizing a good idea to the ground and suffocating it. I try to get out of the way more than anything. What happens as a result of that is, a lot of times, you look back on a song and realize that it has a lot more resonance with your own life than you realized—or that, in hindsight, it was a metaphor for your own experience.

You're coming off three cover records. What impact did those LPs have on your approach?

I used to tell my son, "Not only can you pick up a little money playing Top 40, the practice is a real education" because, as you play these classic songs, you can't help but learn something about composition. In doing those records, I rediscovered these songs that I had sung for years in bands growing up, but it took my perspective at this age to respect them in a whole other way.

What was really hard for me was going back to my original material and loosening the boundaries because a lot of those covers were well-crafted, popular songs written for the medium that they existed in at the time, Top-40 AM radio. They were more than just great, ingenious songs in their own right; they were cleverly written for this tight format. It was odd to go back to recording songs that take eight minutes to unfold or going after arrangements that were a little out of the realm of what might grab people on the radio. Although I love the idea of getting played on the radio and always will, at this point in my career, radio's not such an option for me. It frees me up to record whatever I feel like for whatever audiences are out there.

Warren Haynes appears on *Wide Open* and you recently performed together at his Christmas Jam and as part of "The Last Waltz" tour. What brought you into his world?

Ever since Warren played on my record, *Blink of an Eye*, back in the '80s, I've wanted to work with him again. We wound up playing this "Last Waltz 40 Tour" that Don Was organized, and Warren was pretty much at the helm of that. I realized his capabilities, which are vast. He's a phenomenal contemporary blues guitarist—his singing style, his writing style and his style of playing are so unique to him and yet still very much in the American blues tradition.

You've dipped your toes into the current wave of jazz/R&B that feels especially relevant this year. What's been your takeaway from that experience?

I'm really excited about that quadrant of R&B that's coming out. It's a fantastic new movement that harkens back to jazz-funk and it's great to see it burgeoning into a whole new unique style. I'm not a soloist or a virtuoso, but I love the idea of getting up there and having all that width to work with. It makes for a really great live experience. Those guys leave it pretty wide open—every night there is a different version of the song. Steve's greatly influenced by traditional jazz in a way that I'm not even sure he's aware of. He just naturally absorbs it and it comes out in his music in a very new and unique way.

This year, I've had so many of these experiences that I never dreamed I would have had, like playing with the guys from Snarky Puppy and Vulfpeck at Okeechobee [Music & Arts Festival]. Solange was so gracious to come up and sing "What a Fool Believes" with us. It was a dream come true. My daughter was on the phone with me the whole time, in tears that she wasn't there. But I saw Solange again at Coachella with my daughter [in April]. We made the rounds and went to go see a bunch of other acts play and stayed out until the wee hours of the night.

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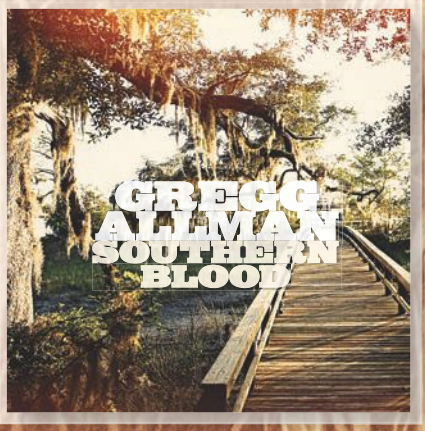

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